UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO TEACHERS' AND A PRINCIPAL'S STORIES OF INFLUENCING PRACTICE

by

Gail Brierley

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Elementary Education

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Gail Brierley

12221 – 25 Avenue NW
Edmonton AB T6J 4S7
Canada

September 25, 2002

Date

I am part of all that I have met.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled A Narrative Inquiry into Teachers' and a Principal's Stories of influencing Practice submitted by Gail Brierley in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Dr. D. Jean Clandinin

Dr. Bill Maynes

Dr. Margaret Haughey

Dr. Sharon Jamieson

Dr. Linda Lambert

September 16, 2002
Date

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify and understand how principals influenced the professional practices of three teachers and how teachers influenced the professional practice of one principal.

The field text for this narrative inquiry evolved over a three-month period spent in and out of three classrooms in one school setting. The research text was composed from transcribed notes of observations, transcriptions of dialogues and semi-structured interviews, and through my personal reflective journal. Using the framework of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (interaction, continuity, and situation) in the process of analyzing the field text, I examined the participants' stories, what meaning the participants attached to them, and how experience, reflection, interpretation and meaning have influenced their professional practices. Two stories of professional influence for each participant were selected from the narrative accounts to be analyzed in-depth. The overall theme of "support" emerged as the primary influence for all four participants. The theme of support in these narrative accounts was further analyzed and I discovered eight categories of influence related to supportive practice. The categories were: demonstrating confidence in practice, affirmation of practice, active involvement, promoting professional development, listening and a sense of humour. The eighth category was lack of support, which shaped and influenced three of the four participants' narrative accounts.

The final chapter is one of reflection as I share how the research experience has influenced my position as principal on the school landscape.

The narrative accounts of the four participants and the theme of support highlight the need for principals to create new meaning of their stories of practice and new dimensions to who they are in their place in schools.

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LESSONS TO LEARN – STORIES OF INFLUENCING PRACTICE

My Journey Begins as a Teacher: Learning from a Principal

"Miss Brierley, please report to my office immediately" came the summons over the p.a. system into my classroom.

"Good grief, " I thought to myself. "What have I done wrong? No one gets called to the principal's office unless they've done something wrong." I hurry down to the office after giving my 27 Grade 6 students instructions to work on the next page in math. I enter the office with trepidation. Sitting in the principal's office is my Sam. My Sam. My Sam who could barely read or write. My Sam who struggled every day to learn, wanting to do a good job in his class work. My Sam, whose father described him as a "big oaf." Just as tall as I was and probably thirty pounds more, my Sam sits there looking like a lost little puppy, big brown eyes looking up at me. Fear registers in me as the look on Sam's face reminds of my younger brother and the look he would get in his eyes when he didn't really know what was wrong, just that something was wrong.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"Sam's been rude to Mrs. Jones." comes the response from behind the principal's desk.

"What has he done that was rude?" I query.

"He's just been rude and now he has to be strapped so that he will learn his lesson and you will be my witness," comes a sharp response.

I stood there in horror. I had never been exposed to that form of physical discipline in my life. Strapping went against everything I believed in for children. Frantically I tried to think of what Sam could have said or done that had been rude. He was usually such a gentle giant.

The tone in the principal's voice told me I had already pushed too far by asking my second question. I was a rookie teacher. I needed a contract. I didn't dare ask anything else. I watch, frozen in anguish. The strap comes down on Sam's hand once, twice, three times. Not once does Sam take his eyes off of me. Not once do I take my eyes off Sam. Both Sam and I fight to hold back the tears.

"There," states my principal, "that will teach you to be rude to a teacher. Miss Brierley, you can take Sam back to class now."

I walk out with Sam by my side. His quiet voice whispers, "Miss Brierley, I don't know what I did that was wrong."

I put my arm around him and give a gentle squeeze. I whisper back, "Neither do I, Sam, neither do I."

Later that day, I approach my principal while he is working in his office. "What exactly did Sam do that was rude?" I ask.

My principal, without looking up, responds by saying, "I don't know exactly. Mrs. Jones just said that he had been rude and that he needed to be strapped and so he was."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. This man strapped a child, based on a teacher's say so without finding out exactly what this child had done. A teacher who had a history of taking great delight in putting me and my class of "hard to manage" children down at every possible opportunity in front of my colleagues and peers. Contract be damned. I approached his desk, placing my two hands on top of his work. He glanced up at me. Tears were streaming down my face.

"You don't know what he said or did? And you didn't bother to find out, you just strapped him anyways?" I cried. I took a deep breath. "Never, ever, ever, will you ask me to witness a strapping again. Ever!" I turned on my heel and left his office, my body trembling. "If this was teaching," I thought, "I better look for a new career."(Story written, April 2001)

Sam. My Sam. My memories of Sam's story were still so fresh in my mind that I needed remind myself that this incident occurred over twenty-four years ago. While reflecting on my stories of teaching, I realized this particular story with Sam played an important part in who I am, both personally and professionally. I have often questioned myself about why I did the things I did. I seemed to have this need to bring meaning to everything. Rethinking Sam's story helped me realize that now, as a principal, when I am faced with a tough decision, I often hesitate and ask myself, "Am I doing the right thing in this situation? Am I doing the best I can?" I often feel uncertain about making immediate decisions and frequently seek information and advice from others to help me better understand the situations and the possible scripts that could be written by my decisions. I realize how cautious I am about making decisions until I believe I have all the information I need. I often spend time reflecting on similar situations that help me

integrate my past experiences to make sense of current decisions. I remember staff members, who, on more than one occasion, have been frustrated with the amount of time it took me to gather information from students or staff when I was determining a course of action to take. However, I know the lasting influence my decisions could have on students and, as in my story with Sam, on teachers and, therefore, choose my course of action only when I feel I am ready to.

This story also reminds me of how I story myself as an advocate for children and the influence, I believe, teachers play in shaping the lives of the children. As a principal, I ask myself – "What can I do to help teachers make a difference in the lives of children?"

My first teaching assignment, the place of Sam's story, was in a grade six classroom in an elementary-junior high school located in a middle class area of a large urban centre. There were seven classes in the elementary wing of the school – one for each grade, kindergarten through grade six. The junior high wing contained nine classes of grade seven, eight, and nine. As I recall, the school seemed to me, as a beginning teacher, to be just like the one I graduated from years before. Everything and everyone had their place.

My grade six class, my first as a teacher, contained a wide assortment of students who had earned a reputation of being a group of misfits – sort of like the 'sweathogs' from the television show, Welcome Back, Kotter. From my first moment with them in early January, 1978, when they informed me they had already finished the grade six curriculum, I knew I would be in for the experience of my life. Feeling strong and tough,

the students believed they had forced their teacher to retire in November and, after a series of substitute teachers, they were more than ready for me.

When I first began teaching twenty-four years ago, my rare interactions with the principal tended to relate to student discipline issues. In my experience, principals spent little if any time in the classroom observing the instructional skills and behaviour management strategies of their staff members. However, my first principal did take one important and influential action. He approached a veteran staff member, Grace, and asked her if she would be willing to provide support and guidance to the newly hired teacher, namely me. Fortunately for me, Grace agreed to provide any assistance I would need.

Everything was new to me. All of my student teaching practica had been in grade two classrooms and to suddenly "move up" to grade six was quite a leap. Interviewed on a Monday and starting two days later did not allow me time to read, absorb or reflect on the curriculum expectations required for grade six. I needed to learn about curriculum and student behaviour at this level quickly. In the beginning, I sought out my mentor for advice on a regular basis.

Learning from my First Mentor, Grace

Grace was a resource room teacher, considered an expert in the area of reading and learning disabilities. She was a good match for me as she was a motherly kind of person, nurturing and caring and, most of all, patient with me as I struggled to learn to teach. It was quickly apparent to me that she was someone who would gently guide me along my

teaching journey and I saw our relationship as an opportunity to learn. Grace willingly shared her expertise as I had, in her words, "this keen desire to know more, to learn more and to pick her brain." I wanted to know why some students learned in certain ways and why some students could not. I believed I was driven to discover the keys to helping children learn because of my brothers' learning struggles in school, the struggles they had in spite of their desire to succeed. Watching them struggle for thirteen years in a school system that appeared, to me, to be rigid was difficult for my family and I knew I did not want this struggle to happen to the children I taught. I was driven to learn how to accommodate students' needs in my classroom, wanting to do the best I could. I believed I had the creativity, enthusiasm and interest to be a good teacher but I needed to learn more about how children learn.

One memorable incident when I relied on Grace's expertise was with the introduction of a new reading series. Because I had not paid much attention in my one university reading curriculum and instruction course, I did not have enough background information to teach reading to my students without some form of guidance. The reading series I used, from January to June of my first year, were two that structured the reading program in a basic, traditional way and all I had to do was follow the teacher's guidebook. However, the two reading series were old and outdated and removed from the approved basic resources list by Alberta Education, and as a result, a new reading series was purchased.

It was the Friday before the Labour Day weekend and I was anxiously awaiting the arrival of our new reading series. During my first partial year working with students, I used a variety of reading series to work with different ability groups. Although the old

reading series did the job adequately, I was excited at the prospect of new resources. Finally, at 2:30 p.m, I got a call from the office letting me know the books had arrived.

I hauled all of the boxes down to my room. Taking out the teacher's resource manual from one box, I read about the three texts in the series. The first text was to develop the theme and comprehension strategies, the second was considered "the reader" and the third text was for enrichment activities.

"Yahoo, " I thought. "My very first brand new reading series!" I eagerly grabbed the first book and plunked myself down in a comfy reading chair at the back of the classroom.

"The first excerpt to be read to students is from Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island," I read. "It takes place after the crew has arrived on the island."

"Hummm," I thought to myself. "Didn't read that book, thought it was for boys. Oh well, that shouldn't stop me."

> "Right you were, Cap'n Smollett," replied Silver, "Dooty is dooty, to be sure."

"Dooty is dooty? What is dooty?" I wondered as a creeping feeling of anxiety began. "Not to worry," I encouraged myself. "Read for context clues." (A strategy I learned about the previous year.)

> "Right you were, Cap'n Smollett," replied Silver. "Dooty is dooty, to be sure. Well, now, you look here, that was a good lay of yours last night."

"A good lay? What does that mean!" I gasped.

> "I don't deny it was a good lay. Some of you pretty handy with a handspike-end. And I'll not deny neither but what some of my people was shook – maybe all was shook; maybe I was shook myself; maybe that's why I'm here for terms. But you mark me, cap'n, it won't do twice, by thunder."

I dropped the book like it was the plague and ran down the hall to find Grace. I searched everywhere – her room, the staff room, the library but no Grace. I rushed to the office to ask the secretary to make an all-call for Grace. The secretary told me Grace had gone home.

I hurried out of the office and back to the staff room where I picked up the telephone receiver and dialed as quickly as I could.

One of Grace's boys picked up the phone and, in a desperate voice, I asked if his mother was at home. Grace came to the phone.

"I don't get this!" I wailed.

"You don't get what?" she asked gently.

The words came tumbling out of me, "I don't get this new reading series and it's got words in it that I don't understand and if I don't get it how can my kids and ..."

Grace immediately sensed I was in dire straits. She invited me over for dinner that evening. Following dinner, she sat down with me and listened to my story.

I told her I had spent some time following our telephone conversation looking through this new series that I was supposed to start teaching with on Tuesday. I found the new reading series not only overwhelming but difficult to set-up organizationally as it did not accommodate for different levels of student ability. As the teacher, I was expected to have the skills to teach the series, however, it was designed to take the story and then break it down rather than teaching the basics of vocabulary, phonetic skills and skills to look at context and meaning first. Furthermore, the series went away from controlled vocabulary and stories rewritten in controlled vocabulary to the actual vocabulary of the time, vocabulary I felt would be incredibly difficult for my students to handle. I also acknowledged I found the reading vocabulary difficult because it was a vernacular that wasn't in the context of my everyday speech. I finished off by being near tears and feeling totally overwhelmed because I needed to make sense of it all and I couldn't.

Grace acknowledged my fears. She had some of my students in her resource room program and, by now, she knew some of my "areas of need" as well. She talked me through the use of the series by helping me take the program and develop a process to use with students while helping some of the students who had specific needs. It was a long, time-consuming task working through the series but she never once indicated the students or I weren't worth it.

Our relationship quickly went from professional mentorship to friendship. I found myself drawn to Grace not only because of her commitment and dedication as a teacher but as well by her commitment and dedication to her family and their ongoing experiences with learning disabilities –a characteristic I could so readily relate to. I recall Grace as being there for me at school when I needed her, always willing to provide advice and support. She frequently shared personal incidents to support her suggestions – incidents I could relate to. Soon she saw me as one of her 'kids' – and I quickly became part of her family. (Story written, April 2001)

When I thought back to this time with Grace, I remembered the hours and hours we spent together. Every time I had questions about what I was doing in the classroom and how I could make learning better for my students, she was there to offer me suggestions or resources I could use to help me learn to be better as a classroom teacher. On the rare occasion when she did not have a solution, she would listen to my questions and gently

offer her support while encouraging me to risk trying something new. Grace also taught me how to laugh at my numerous mistakes over my early years of teaching. She helped me gain confidence in myself as a learner and as a teacher. I wondered how my experience of being mentored by Grace had helped to shape who I was as a principal.

While recalling this story, I also remembered the strong personal attachments for my students and for those with whom I worked. In rereading this story, I was reminded of one of my professional belief statements, to make every day valuable in the lives of students. I remembered how important it was for me that positive results come from the work I do. As a principal, I believed teachers had the greatest influence on students and, as a result, it was my responsibility to help them make everyday valuable for students. I asked myself, "How could I help teachers make school a better place for students to learn?"

My Journey to Administration: Learning from Shawna, a Principal

During my eighth year of teaching, I received an appointment to a junior high school as a teacher and an assistant principal. This junior high school was considered to have characteristics similar to an inner city school. High transiency, low socio-economic family status and unemployment were prevalent in many of the family situations. My new principal, Shawna, was well respected and considered by my colleagues to be an outstanding leader – receptive to new ideas and strategies to help students learn.

"We'll share everything because we're a team," she explained at our first meeting of the new school year. "With the exception of budget, which I'll handle and special needs which you'll handle."

My mouth dropped. I didn't know anything about being an assistant principal. Sure I had handled a few administrative duties when I moved into the role of counsellor at my previous school but just to assume I could move into this assignment was a quantum leap of faith as far as I was concerned.

"I'm not sure I'll know how to do that," I responded.

She smiled at me and gently said, "Sure you will. And if you don't, come and ask me and I'll help you." (Story written, April, 2001)

Over that year, I learned from Shawna. Although she modeled what I had read in leadership books were the skills of effective principals, it was the skills she modeled that were not in those books that helped me the most in my leadership career. In a school with a duo female administration team, I learned the importance of prioritizing where your energy was focused. For example, one of the male teachers on staff felt we, as female administrators, would not be able to effectively address his classroom behavioural concerns. As a result, he tried to rally the rest of the male staff members together for a meeting one afternoon after school. When I asked Shawna what she was going to do about this, she told me she believed the other male staff members respected her enough that they wouldn't attend and she was not going to worry about it until after the meeting happened. Although I, as a new assistant principal, worried a lot about the prospect of this meeting, in the end, she was right. The meeting did not take place and the message made to that teacher from his peers was far more effective than if Shawna had intervened. I also learned from Shawna to story myself in a more rounded way by having a greater balance in my life through regularly scheduled activities outside of school. Shawna saw

how easily I wrapped myself up in my new assignment, spending hours at the school. She took it upon herself to introduce me to the game of bridge and a new circle of friends. By debriefing difficult situations with her, Shawna taught me the importance of being a reflective practitioner. By asking me what I would do differently the next time or what I believed the impact of my decisions were, she knew I would be able to look at these alternatives in future situations. More than anything, I learned from Shawna the importance of using a sense of humour or doing the unexpected to solve potential problems with junior high students.

The first junior high program for students with behaviour disorders for the school district was situated at our school. Eight young men, ages twelve to fifteen, worked in a classroom with a teacher and a program aide. All of the students were diagnosed with psychiatric disorders such as oppositional defiant or conduct disorders. Easily frustrated with rules and academic expectations, these young men would frequently require intervention by staff members.

The group's ring leader, a young man named Jack, had an I.Q.score in the gifted range. "Brilliant" and "manipulative" were the two words that best described him for me. One day, Jack had done a variety of things to set off the boys in the classroom and Shawna and I decided Jack needed to leave the school for a few days so we could settle things down. Shawna had a meeting with some other parents and Jack was to wait for his mother in my office. I was panic stricken. How was I going to handle him? Privately, Shawna reassured me I could handle the situation. She advised me to be careful not to let Jack "push any of my buttons."

We sat in my office, Jack across the desk from me. I attempted to look like I was doing work at my desk, all the while my stomach was churning inside. After a few minutes, Jack began humming the music from the Lydo Chinese Food advertisement. I attempted to keep working. He started to pick up knick-knacks on my desk, all the while looking at me. I would glance up and think to myself – "Is this something worth fighting over?" "No," was invariably my immediate thought. After about five minutes of picking up knick-knacks and getting no response from me, Jack looked for other sources of entertainment.

He looked out of my open office window for several minutes and then turned to me.

"Miss Brierley?" he inquired.

"Yes, Jack," I responded. By this time my stomach was in perpetual motion.

"If I go out this window, will you chase me?" he asked.

"This is it," I thought. "I know this is a trick question. Use humour, Shawna said."

Suddenly, a hysteric image popped into my head. I swung my foot up on my desk.

"Jack," I said. "See these three inch heels. I'm not running after anybody. Not even for a wealthy bachelor carrying a chocolate bar. If you want to go, go. Be my guest. I'll be here when you get back."

I put my foot back on the ground and bent over my desk re-reading the same thing I had read for the previous ten minutes.

I didn't hear another sound out of Jack as we waited for his mother to arrive to take him home. (Story written, April, 2001)

The children in the class for students labeled behaviour-disordered kept me on my toes all year providing me with several opportunities to meet their challenges. Several months later, Shawna's sense of humour lessons were again put to good use.

The eight boys knew we were able to handle situations when one or two of them acted up. Even on the rare occasion when three of them decided to "go off the wall," we were pretty much able to contain them.

It happened on one glorious May afternoon. You know, the type of day when the last place you wanted to be was in school. About one thirty in the afternoon, I received a call from the teacher in the behaviour-disorder classroom. All eight boys had decided to go AWOL. They were running around the perimeter of the school building, refusing to come inside. I went to the front doors of the school to take a look. There they were – jumping and leaping through the air, frolicking like new colts who had just discovered their legs.

I opened the door and stepped out from the building. They glanced at me and continued to play.

"You need to come inside," I said in my sternest administrator's voice.

"We don't want to and you can't make us," replied Jack.

I repeated myself again. "You need to come inside, now."

"No, you can't make us," the boys chanted back.

I heard a sound behind me. It was the night custodian, Ted, who had come out to see if I needed any help.

Suddenly, I knew what to do. I motioned to Ted to follow me back inside. Glancing back towards the boys, I said, "Lock the doors."

"What?!?" asked Ted incredulously.

"Lock all of the doors," I said. "If they don't want to be in school, far be it for me to make them stay. I'll contact their parents and they can come and pick them up."

Ted did as I asked, all the while, looking at me as if I had lost my mind. I directed the secretaries to contact the boys' parents to come and get them.

It took a few minutes for the boys to realize that I was serious. They banged on the doors, yelling, "You can't do this. You can't lock us out."

"I just did, " I said as I waited by the door for eight sets of parents to come and pick up their children. (Story written, April, 2001)

Through my experiences with Shawna and Jack, I learned to tell a story of myself as someone whose creativity as a teacher and an administrator need not be stifled when looking for solutions to unpleasant situations. Although I storied myself as someone who liked to be knowledgeable about my practice, my first story of Shawna, similar to my story of Grace, taught me to take risks and reflect on my actions. This type of reflection allowed me to reexamine my decisions and taught me to recognize other ways of handling them. I knew I made numerous mistakes as an assistant principal and, through my reflections, I believed I storied myself as someone who learned from these mistakes and used them to shape my professional identity. In addition to learning from my mistakes, I realized the sense of order and logic I liked in my day to day work did not

always occur. I learned, as in my story of Jack, using my sense of humour helped to story a more rounded "me" as an assistant principal and later as a principal.

Knowing that, as a principal, I needed to be able to take risks and be prepared to make mistakes in order to help teachers make school a better place for students to learn, I asked, "How can I have the greatest influence on teachers in my school?"

My Journey Continues: Learning as a Principal from David

When I was deciding which stories to share in my introduction, I realized I had a variety of possibilities to select from. I noticed the stories I chose showed a great deal of the passion I felt about my experiences as a teacher and an administrator. These stories tended to be ones where I wanted to learn more about a situation or ones I believed needed to be reexamined. I knew I was someone who looked at challenges as opportunities to be a better teacher and a better principal. Challenge is what led me to the next part of my story.

When I first became a principal, the superintendent I worked with had a dominating influence on the direction our school district was taking. I learned rather quickly to keep a quiet distance from this man, as I believed that who and what I was in his story of school was irrelevant to his plan. Much of what I did was insulated by my associate superintendent and rarely did the superintendent and I discuss matters of educational importance. In the spring of 1995, during my seventh year as a principal, a new

superintendent took over and, although he had previously worked in our district, I had not met him.

In the early fall of 1995, my personal life was falling apart. An engagement ended and my younger brother died of a fast-progressing and brutal form of cancer. This was the second time I had lost a younger sibling so tragically. While in Calgary for my brother's funeral, my father was hospitalized due to a sudden illness. Upon my return from two weeks leave, my secretary informed me the superintendent was coming out to the school to visit in three days time. This was about the last thing I wanted to hear. Not only had my previous experiences with a superintendent not been rewarding or satisfying but I was also fighting mad at the world.

On my third day back at school, David arrived. I was playing catch-up in my office. I heard David greet my secretary and left my office to meet him. After our initial introductions, we returned to my office.

It was only after he sat down that I noticed he held a file folder. The first few minutes in my office seemed like an eternity as he sat there, thumbed through the file and occasionally looked up at me. I didn't have the foggiest idea what was going on and waited in silence.

Finally, he looked up at me and stated, "Ah, yes. You're the one who doesn't back down."

I was stunned by his comment. I quickly regained my composure and said, "When it comes to kids – no, I don't." and we began to talk about my beliefs as an educator. About 15 minutes into the conversation, he asked me what I thought of him as superintendent. With my limited exposure, I did what I do best – I put my mouth in gear before my brain and responded that I thought he was a "pee or get off the pot" kind of guy. He looked at me in silence. I then suggested a different (and more appropriate) kind of analogy. I said that I saw him as the conductor of a train and that one either got on board or got the hell off the track. He looked at me, grinned, and said, "Yes. That's about right." (Even reflecting about this six years later, I cringe to think that I said what

I did that day.) After I hesitated for a brief moment, we continued our animated conversation about our school district, the principalship and my school.

About 30 minutes later, David asked, "So when are you going to go back to university to get your master's degree?"

Where this came from – I'll never know. I was amazed he knew I didn't have my master's degree. I wondered why would he ask me such a question, anyway. I told him that I couldn't do my master's degree without going back to university and upgrading and I didn't want to do that. My experience during the first four years of my university career had been unpleasant enough.

David, in a very matter of fact tone, told me that the university would take me into the master's program and I would not need to upgrade. I was stunned and asked him how he could possibly say that. He calmly looked at me and said he would act as my advocate and I was to start thinking about going back.

I couldn't believe this man, who had known me for such a short period of time, could have that level of confidence and faith in me and would be willing to put his reputation on the line. Would I be able to do it? Would I be able to honour his belief in me? It was a huge challenge but one I couldn't back away from. (Story written, April, 2001)

My story of David helped me understand that I told a story of myself as someone who liked to be around people who shared my interest for knowledge and held similar convictions. I believed I would not have returned to university to complete my master's and doctoral degree if David had not challenged me to do so. His support and confidence in me, demonstrated through his recommendation to the university that I be granted admission to further my formal learning, was a significant influence for me. To know I was working for a person who wanted the best for me, gave me the courage to continue looking for new ways to help teachers in the classroom.

My stories, as a teacher and a principal, helped me identify an important part of my professional identity, a part that said I did not want to be in a place where who I am was

defined by literature written by people who have not lived my experiences. I found living my story easier when I knew others I respected were also creating their unique stories as principals. I wondered how many other principals told similar stories to mine. Were their stories an integral part of what they brought to the principalship? I asked myself, "How can I continue to learn as a principal?"

Through this wondering I started to frame my research puzzle. Although I was curious to know what stories principals told of influencing teachers' practices, an even more curious wondering arose. If, as principals, we worked to improve our practice and to influence the practices of teachers, what stories would teachers tell about how principals have influenced their practices? Would teachers tell stories similar to my first story, ones where principals influenced them in negative ways? Would they tell stories similar to my story of Grace, a mentor who listened to my concerns and anxieties and then guided my practice so I could become a better teacher? Would they tell stories similar to Shawna, where their principals' confidence and sense of humour shaped who they, as teachers, were in their practice? Would teachers tell stories, like my stories of David, where their principals had similar beliefs to theirs about formal professional growth? Or would they tell other stories, stories that would help influence my practice as a principal?

A Reflective Turn

It was over twenty years since the beginning of my professional story. I looked back on my story of Sam and wondered if my principal eyes would have viewed the story any differently than my beginning teacher eyes did? If I had been a more experienced

teacher, would I have responded differently? Was my sense of social justice still as strong as it was twenty years ago now that I have learned to see more "shades of gray"? I wondered what I learned from my stories that helped to shape who I am today. I wondered what stories teachers would tell of me as principal learner.

Life as a principal has shown me there are times when everyone wants my attention. I wondered how often I hurried through things without thinking about the long-term ramifications of my decisions as I felt happened in Sam's story. How often did I take time to sit and reflect on situations that arose or did I use my "intuition" more than I should have? I wondered how often teachers felt I was teaching a new way to look at situations in the story of school. I wondered what stories of teaching teachers told of me as principal teacher.

Through the years, I have had opportunities, both formally and informally, to take on the role of mentor to others as Grace, Shawna, and David did for me. Sometimes I was able to provide guidance and assistance and sometimes I was only able to listen. I realized being a mentor was not always an easy job for me. At times I found my patience tried and my energy exhausted as I was pulled in many directions as a principal. Although they never gave me that impression, I wondered if I tried Grace's, Shawna's and David's patience, too. I wondered what stories of mentoring teachers told of me as principal mentor.

I believed my stories framed me as a learner, a teacher, a mentor. These three plotlines in my professional story helped shape me as a teacher and as a principal. They were not the only plotlines. There are other plotlines such as business manager, public relations officer and employee of a large organization but, I believed principal as learner, principal as teacher and principal as mentor were the three most visible in my practice. It was like I was the conductor of an orchestra and these three plotlines were the three of the main instruments that played the different parts of melody lines of school. I came to this understanding when I recently had an opportunity to spend an evening listening to Tommy Banks and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra.

As Banks conducted and the orchestra played excerpts from "West Side Story" and other upbeat Broadway tunes, I sat back in my seat and relaxed, letting my mind wander while I listened to the beautiful melodies flowing throughout the Winspear Theatre. Many images passed before me, largely shaped by the musical selections and, as I sat there, I thought about the various events occurring in my life.

My eyes followed Banks as he moved about on the stage, leading the orchestra through various arrangements, focusing, at different points, on the percussion, woodwind, brass and string sections as their instruments played a particular emphasis in the pieces selected for the evening's performance. While I watched, I was reminded of my stories of school and how others influenced my practice.

As I listened to the rhythmic beats of the percussion section, I thought of the day to day pulse of school, activities facilitated by the support staff, particularly the administrative assistant, who assisted the principal in the routine running of the school. Like the percussion instruments, support staff helped to maintain the flow and rhythm of the school. Although I did not believe they were the most important aspect of the school landscape, without the support staff being in sync with the principal, a school could easily be thrown into a state of chaos.

As Banks focused on the brass section, I was reminded of the parents and the school community/public relationships theme that has become such an integral part of schools today, the so-called "blowing of one's horn." Although, I believed, this to be a secondary theme of the principal's professional identity, again it was one that greatly shaped the school landscape, particularly when those instruments were blaring.

As the woodwinds tooted and played upbeat selections, I thought of the interactions principals have with students. Although woodwind instruments tend to be soft, every once in a while, a squeaky note could be heard and I thought of how important it was for principals to listen to the distinct melody of student voices.

However, it was the string section that captured my attention. As my companion that evening shared, so often the string section was the heart of the orchestra. This thought stuck a chord with me as I believed teachers, similar to the string section, were the heart of a school. I recalled listening to the symphony orchestra in the past and realized how

the string section often played the bulk of the melodies in the pieces selected. By the time intermission arrived, I began to understand how the string section tied the orchestra together in a similar way to how teachers tied school communities together.

As I thought about the violin, viola and cello in the string section of the orchestra, I was reminded of my research and how I looked at each principal as a learner, as a teacher and as a mentor through the eyes of principals and teachers. I realized these three instruments played important sections in the musical score the conductor used to lead the orchestra. They emphasized different parts of the melody lines just as principals as learners, principals as teachers and principals as mentors are important instruments used to play different sections of the melody lines in a principal's symphony of school. Occasionally these instruments took on a solo part in a musical selection, but most often they blended together and harmonized to create the magic of a musical symphony. In a similar fashion, I believed I sometimes storied myself as one of these instruments – as a learner, teacher or mentor, and sometimes I storied myself as two, but most often they were woven together to create harmony in my professional story – my very own musical symphony. I wondered how many of my colleagues would tell their stories in similar ways.

Paley (1990) stated:

> None of us are to be found in sets of tasks or lists of attributes, we can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events. (p. xii)

If, as Paley (1990) said, I thought of myself not as a list of attributes but rather as an unfolding of a unique musical symphony, I wondered how many other people would

story principals in a similar way. I used this wondering as a framework for my research. I asked, "What stories would teachers tell of how principals have influenced their practices? What stories would principals tell of how teachers have influenced their practices?" I believed the exploration of these questions in the lived stories of principals and teachers would help to provide me with new ways of thinking.

CHAPTER TWO – THE RESEARCH LITERATURE CONTEXT

Principals as learners, principals as teachers, and principals as mentors were three important plotlines in my story. Like the violin, viola and cello, they played important melody lines in my musical symphony, my professional story: melody lines such as the one I learned from teachers regarding the importance of having high expectations for my special needs children, not limiting their future achievements because of their disabilities; or the melody line of teaching my teachers Alberta Learning's teacher professional growth plans were not an add-on to their already taxing demands of the classroom by demonstrating how these plans were similar to what we were already doing in school; or the melody as principal as mentor, of mentoring Grace when she became a principal a couple of years after I had. These three parts of my professional identity were main influences in my stories of school. I wondered if others would story principals the same way. The next step into my inquiry was to research the current literature on the principalship in relation to these topics.

I first began to review the leadership literature I had accumulated over the past couple of years from the different professional development activities held in our district and in my master's and doctoral work. I was familiar with work done by DuFour and Eaker (1998), Blase and Blase (1997, 1998a, 1999a) and Sergiovanni (1995). From those sources and conversations with other people, I began to look closer at work by Lambert (1998), Daresh (2001) and others. Citations from one resource frequently led to others. I searched the library data banks for books and articles related to the topics of the principalship, mentorship, and instructional leadership.

Principals as Learners

As my research interest was related to understanding how my practice as a principal had shaped teachers' practices, I realized I needed to attend to the ways the research literature shaped my identity, as a learner, teacher and mentor. As a principal, I worked to learn how to develop a better sense of my professional identity and to find out how I could become more influential in my job. I spent a great deal of time over the course of fourteen years as a principal reading literature and participating in professional growth activities designed to provide me with tools for effective leadership in schools. One of these activities included my master's degree in educational administration which focused on designing staff professional development plans. However, some of my professional development activities did not resonate with me. While I found I may have learned from these activities on the surface, I did not make these strategies or skills part of my professional practice. However, at times, when reading authors such as DuFour and Eaker (1998), Covey (1989), and Ackerman, Donaldson and Van Der Bogert (1996), or attending seminars presented by Lambert, Sergiovanni and Fullan, I would feel myself silently cheering "Yes! Yes! Yes!" as the material resonated with my practices. It was this literature I included in the following sections.

Ackerman, Donaldson and Van Der Bogert (1996) wrote leadership was a learning activity, that principals were model learners for others. They believed the image of the principal was one of a public learner where the principal's personal learning often resulted in changed interpersonal behaviour with teachers. These changes were likely to

influence the interpersonal behaviour of teachers with children as student learning was facilitated.

Harstock (1983) found for principals "to lead [was] to be at the center of the group rather than in the front of the others" (p. 8). She went on to say having input from teachers was critical because of their practical knowledge. Lieberman (1995) supported Harstock's earlier findings by saying "the 1990's view of leadership calls for principals to act as partners with teachers, involved in a collaborative quest to examine practices and improve schools" (p. 9). Principals, as lead learners, must continually align educational practices with the purpose and mission of their schools as they searched for ways to successfully implement organizational and instructional changes in practice. Ackerman et al. (1996) believed for principals to be successful, they must model effective problem finding, information sharing, and solution identifying. Zepeda (1999) drew attention to his research which showed effectiveness in school leadership was characterized by an orientation toward continuous learning. If learning was a life-long pursuit and the goal was to constantly improve education, then educators, too, must be continually engaged in updating their knowledge and skills. In summary, principals must be the lead learners in their schools and their learning needed to be continuous. I wondered if teachers would story their principals as the lead learner who had influenced their practice.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggested, to have the greatest impact on student learning, principals needed to create professional learning communities in schools. They believed, in a professional learning community, the emphasis must be on relationships, shared

ideals and a strong culture where all stakeholders within a school understood that continuous improvement required ongoing learning on the part of all the people within it. DuFour and Eaker also suggested the principalship was more about learning and leading than command and control. In their research, Jentz and Wofford (1979) found educational relationships and partnerships developed in the learning community within the school when stakeholders worked together to create positive, enduring changes.

Jentz and Wofford (1979) also suggested principals implement the following learning framework in order to develop their capacity as lead learners within schools:

1. Acknowledge discrepancies between intentions, actions, and consequences;
2. Examine practice by looking at assumptions about self and others;
3. Make new sense based on alternative assumptions about self and others;
4. Practice new behaviour based on these alternative assumptions;
5. Take new action by using one's position as a leader to create alternative conditions for learning. (pp. 5-6).

Malderez and Bodóczky (1999) believed that in order to examine practices and make new sense of these as described by Jentz and Wolford (1979), principals needed the skills, tools and processes for continuing their own learning of teaching throughout their professional lives or in Schön's (1983) words to become "reflective practitioners" (p. 13).

Schön (1983) referred to professional practice as "performance in a range of professional situations … [which] … also included an element of repetition" (p. 60). He believed it was through this repetition a practitioner developed "a repertoire of expectations, images and techniques"–a "knowing-in-practice" which over time became "increasingly tacit,

spontaneous, and automatic" (p. 60). He found unexpected results caused a practitioner to reflect back on what they had done in this lived experience in order to discover how his/her knowing-in-action may have contributed to this unexpected outcome. Schön (1987) also suggested a practitioner reflected in the midst of an action without interrupting it. He labeled this as "reflection-in-action" where our thinking served to reshape what we were while we were doing it when we could still make a difference to the current situation. Schön went on to say:

> What distinguishes reflection-in-action from other kinds of reflection is its immediate significance for action. In reflection-in-action, the rethinking of some part of our knowing-in-action leads to on the spot experiment and further thinking that affects what we do. (p. 29)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) elaborated on Schön's description by saying reflection-in-action was "research in a practical context in which the researcher [was] not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique but [constructed] a new theory" (p. 35). Both Schön and Clandinin and Connelly saw principals as learners in the context of learning by acting and reflecting on their actions.

Schön (1987) suggested that, through consistent and authentic reflective practice, a principal created understanding and made new sense of situations from which he/she could learn. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) supported Schön's work and found reflective practice was a method used by principals to develop a greater self-awareness of the nature and influence of one's performance.

Sergiovanni (1995) stated:

> Professionals rely…on informed intuition as they create knowledge in use. Intuition is informed by theoretical knowledge on the one hand and by interacting with the context of practice on the other. … When principals use informed intuition, they … are engaged in reflective practice. Knowing is in the action itself, as reflective professionals become students of their practice. (p. 32)

He concluded by saying reflective principals brought together knowledge of relevant techniques and competent application of "rules of thumb" with a sense of their practice and an ability to reflect on this practice as they created something of practical use (p. 34). As a principal, I believed it was important to be knowledgeable of techniques and strategies to inform my practice and more importantly to develop the skills needed to reflect on this knowledge as it applied to my professional practice.

Ackerman et al. (1996) found a principal's public learning could be a powerful model for students, staff and community. Principals who demonstrated this public learning and their belief in continuous improvement and reflective practice became effective mentors for others in their learning community.

The literature related to principal as learner, as outlined by Ackerman et al. (1996), Zepeda (1999), and DuFour and Eaker (1998), reinforced for me the importance of modeling life long learning as a principal. Similarly, as suggested by Harstock (1983) and Lieberman (1995), I realized I learned better in group situations where I could dialogue and discuss ideas as part of a group rather than on my own. My story as a principal resonated with what Schön (1983) called "knowing-in-practice" and "reflection-in-action." Just when I thought I knew how to do my job, a situation would arise that I had never handled before and I felt like I was starting all over again like a rookie.

However, I tried to look at these situations as opportunities to grow through reflecting on my previous practices as I continued to learn how to make my school a better place for staff and students. I learned to reach out and ask others for help so I could learn from their experiences and tap into Sergiovanni's "rule of thumb" in order to make sense of my practice. I believed the literature shared in this section shaped my story and, as such, enabled me to reach out to help others as a supporter, motivator and mentor. This literature affirmed the importance of acknowledging principals as learners. I wondered if other principals modeled ongoing, continuous learning, using reflection to grow and develop a knowing-in-practice which influenced the practices of the teachers with whom they worked.

Principals as Mentors

While reviewing the research related to principal as mentor, I spent many hours wondering how my mentorship skills and strategies had been seen in relationship to guiding, supporting and influencing teachers towards achieving our school's vision and goals. I wondered if other principals and teachers lived and told their stories in similar ways to mine. When I thought about the people who had the greatest influence for me in my professional practice and the relationships I created as a result, I realized these were people who storied their lives to journey a path similar to mine, people like Grace, Shawna and David. They were people who, as Daloz (1999) suggested, I turned to at crucial turning points in my career. They were individuals who I saw as having similar priorities for students and staff and yet I saw each of us as having storied professional practice in slightly different ways. I felt an acceptance from them to script my story in a

way similar to theirs and, as Bova and Phillips (1984) found, to take risks outside my comfort zone to better my own practice. I wondered if other principals and teachers find similar influences of guiding, support and risk-taking in their stories.

Through collaboration, dialogue and modeling, I felt Grace, Shawna, and David, as well as other significant individuals, storied me as an equal and a partner. Daresh and Playko (1990) and Healy and Welchert (1990) found mentoring relationships were reciprocal relationships where stories of practice could be shared openly and honestly both on and off professional landscapes as in my relationships with Grace, Shawna and David.

In my experience school communities were made up of many types of relationships – teacher and student; teacher and teacher; teacher and parent, student and student; parent and student, principal and teacher; principal and student, and principal and parent. I have found there were many ways to story these relationships so that they could be developed and sustained. Many of my relationships were a result of: listening, discussions in informal dialogue and formal conversations, and using encouragement and support to guide others through their experiences in a school setting.

Research by Healy and Welchert (1990), Playko (1991), Daloz (1999), Daresh (2001) and others showed that one of the most significant ways to develop relationships within a school and throughout professional life was through the mentoring process. I found this to be true in both my professional and personal life as well. The insights, understanding and advice people such as Grace, Shawna and David gave me helped to shape who I am

today. Research by Playko (1991), Bova and Phillips (1984), Schön (1983) and Capasso and Daresh (2001) showed the acknowledged benefits of such a process included: encountering new ideas, techniques, and strategies for practice (Playko, 1991), increased confidence and competence (Bova & Phillips, 1984) and developing skills of reflection (Schön, 1983, Capasso & Daresh, 2001). I believed these benefits were facilitated through the reciprocal relationships to which Daresh and Palyko (1990) and Healy and Weichert (1990) referred. I wondered what stories principals and teachers would share about the influence of reciprocal relationships on their professional landscape.

Interestingly enough, Dewey (1938) noted the importance of the mentoring process early in the 20th century. At that time, he acknowledged that individuals who were given the opportunity to learn from enriching experiences, such as mentoring relationships, and were able to reflect upon these experiences, attained many of their personal and professional goals. I wondered if other principals and teachers had professional goals that were influenced and attained through the help of mentors.

Daresh (2001) defined mentoring as:

> an ongoing process in which individuals in an organization provide support and guidance to others who can become effective contributors to the goals of the organization. Unlike many other views of mentoring, a mentor does not necessarily have to be an older person who is ready, willing, and able to provide all of the answers to those who are newcomers. Usually, mentors have a lot of experience and craft knowledge to share with others. Being a mentor implies the responsibility of not only sharing but also of listening and learning. (p. 3)

Healy and Welchert's (1990) definition of mentoring, as did Daresh's, included the development of a dynamic, reciprocal, interactive, collegial relationship that enhanced professional growth. Daresh and Playko (1990) suggested the mentoring process should be a shared learning experience for both participants as they help each other examine options for resolving problems. They also suggested this two-way, reciprocal process should be carried out in a risk-free environment where both the mentor and the protégé were " encouraged to express inner feelings, thoughts, and questions regarding their professional roles or personal problems" (p.125). Such a sharing relationship served as a form of motivation for both the mentor and the protégé by creating a desire for both to grow personally and professionally. Being able to risk sharing with Grace, Shawna and David in a safe environment, enabled me to question more common solutions and look for new ways of handling problems that I would not have found if I felt they believed there was only one correct answer. I wondered what type of open, risk-taking relationships other principals and teachers developed and how these relationships influenced their practice.

Brookover (1982) divided the principalship into two categories: the instructional leader and the change agent. He believed two of the most critical functions of the principal were (a) to facilitate the improvement of the instructional program and (b) to encourage teachers to be risk takers in trying innovative techniques and strategies. In Brookover's view, mentoring was an essential strategy in supporting, guiding, and encouraging people to become the best they could be, both personally and professionally. This, he believed, was particularly true if principals were expected to undertake instructional leadership

behaviours rather than to behave in the same old ways demonstrated by other principals in a system (p. 126). I believed Grace, Shawna and David treated me as an individual within the context of the principalship. They understood that everything I had lived both in and out of the classroom was part of who I was. My relationship with each of them was an expression of Brookover's belief that a mentor encourages both personal and professional growth. I wondered if our relationships were unique or whether other principals and teachers shared similar stories of influence where mentors cared about who they were as total persons.

The results of a survey by Bova and Phillips (1984) suggested protégés learned the following from principal mentors: risk taking behaviours, communication skills, survival skills, professional skills, skills in setting high standards, skills in being a good listener, respect for others and other leadership qualities. In analyzing their data, Bova and Phillips (1984) concluded:

> mentoring relationships have been found to be critically important to developing professionals. They are especially important in overcoming reality shock – the conflict that arises when the difference between what one thinks a job is all about and what it is really all about. (p. 19)

Bova and Phillips' (1984) findings resonated with me as I found the difference in what I perceived teaching to be about and what I experienced it to be over the past twenty-four years has stunned me at times. I found I needed to be much more than an instructor in the classroom and instructional leader in the school. Some days I mothered children emotionally by comforting them, often on situations unrelated to school and learning. I washed soiled clothes, fed hungry mouths, found gently-used clothes for children to wear. I met with counsellors, psychiatrists, police, probation officers, lawyers, politicians

and marriage counsellors. I dealt with the death of parents by natural and unnatural causes and I have been called, while out of town on vacation, to deal with parental concerns. I supported some teachers through the birth and, unfortunately, the death of children. I have celebrated marriages and comforted through divorces. What I viewed life in the classroom as being twenty-four years ago, was nowhere near the reality I lived on the school landscape. Without the support of those around me, my mentors, to guide me through these times of change, I do not believe I would have been able to continue in the principalship. I wondered if other teachers and principals had stories of influence where they have turned to their mentors in times of turmoil.

Daloz (1999) suggested mentors were especially important at the beginning of people's careers or at crucial turning points in their professional lives. They were individuals who accomplished the goals to which the protégés now aspired, offering encouragement and concrete help. He found people trusted mentors because of the mentors' willingness to care about what and whom they taught or alternatively, the mentors' place in the growth of those for whom they cared. Daloz (1999) further suggested a principal mentor was someone who led people along the journey of their lives. He found principal mentors acted as "guides, by walking at times ahead of their students, at times beside them; and at times, following their lead" (p. 244). He believed "effective mentors add value and moral content to the relationship–inspiring a sense of worthy purpose" (p. 244). In the characteristics and roles of mentors, Daloz highlighted the importance of viewing a principal as a mentor. I wondered what stories teachers told of having their practices shaped through principals' mentoring practices.

Fleming (1991) contended a principal mentor must be a listener, a confidant, a motivator, and a communicator for the protégé. Fullerton and Malderez (1999) offered a further set of characteristics for the principal mentor. They found a principal mentor was: a model who inspired and demonstrated, an acculturator who assisted the protégé in getting used to the professional culture; a sponsor who introduced the protégé to other people in the profession, a supporter who provided opportunities for the protégé to let off steam, while acting as a sounding board; and an educator who encouraged the articulation of ideas and created opportunities for the protégé to achieve his/her professional learning goals.

I wondered if these characteristics (model, acculturator, sponsor, supporter, and educator) were ones teachers saw principals using to influence their practice. Would teachers believe these characteristics of principal involvement encouraged their success on the professional landscape?

Whitebook and Bellm (1996) described educational mentors as:

> skilled in their craft, creative in problem solving, able to reflect on their practice, flexible in relating to other adults, willing to take risks in order to grow, and ready to learn new information about the process of teaching adults. Mentors are guides and role models who talk openly and directly with protégés about their work, help them improve their skills and provide information and feedback. Mentors encourage protégés to take risks, meet new challenges, and develop their professional goals. Mentors themselves are open to learning – gaining insight from their protégés, gaining new skills, and reflecting on their own practices. (p. 60)

I valued learning from my mentors and I also valued knowing my mentors learned from me. In my early days as a principal, my associate superintendent, another important

mentor, shared how much he valued learning about special needs children from me. He said he believed, as a result of our conversations, he was able to bring a more informed understanding when working with others in relation to the needs of children with disabilities. I wondered if principals and teachers experienced a similar kind of mentoring partnership, learning from one another, a learning that influenced and shaped their practices.

Capasso and Daresh (2001) outlined the following practical set of behaviours that characterized successful principal mentors:

- Effective principal mentors should have experience as practicing school administrators, and they should be regarded by peers and others as effective.
- Effective principal mentors must demonstrate generally accepted positive leadership qualities, such as (but not limited to) the following: intelligence; good oral and written communication skills; past, present, and future understanding with simultaneous orientation; acceptance of multiple alternative solutions to complex problems; clarity of vision and the ability to share that vision with others in the organization
- Principal mentors need to be able to ask the right questions and not just provide the "right" answers all the time.
- Effective principal mentors must accept an alternative way of doing things and avoid the tendency to tell beginners that the way to do things is "the way I used to do it."
- Effective principal mentors should express a desire to see people go beyond their present levels of performance, even if that might mean that their protégés are able to do some things better than the mentors can.
- Effective principal mentors need to model the principles of continuous learning and reflection.
- Effective principal mentors must exhibit an awareness of the political and social realities of life in at least one school system; they must know the "real ways" that things get done. (p. 113)

Capasso and Daresh (2001) wrote about how successful principal mentors needed not only the experience but also the ability to be effective. They stressed how a mentor

needed to ask questions, not just provide answers. I wondered how many other principals and teachers would story their experiences with mentors in this mutual learning way.

Whitebook and Bellm (1996) suggested principals should use mentoring principles to help teachers do the best job possible. Reiman and Thies-Sprintal (1998) supported this suggestion as they believed "the cornerstone of effective supervision is caring and progressively collaborative teaching between educators as developing adults" (p. 2). Capasso and Daresh (2001). Whitebook and Bellm (1996) and Reiman and Thies-Sprintall (1998) wrote about the need for mentors to be cheerleaders, to have a sense of pride in their mentorees as part of teams and to always encourage the best job possible. I believed Grace, Shawna and David were strong cheerleaders for me. I wondered if teachers and principals would have stories of influence where their mentors were cheerleaders for them as well.

As a principal mentor, I believed the passion I had for my job should be reflected in my everyday school life. As Brookover (1982), Daloz (1999) and Daresh (2001) found, I, too, strove to work along side my colleagues to guide them in ways that would improve their practice. I spent a great deal of time, similar to Whitebook and Bellm's (1996) description, in both formal and informal settings, sharing my experiences and encouraging others to work towards improving their professional practices. I tried to do this through listening and learning from my colleagues, encouraging and supporting them to be the best they could be for students, and through modeling and teaching. But I wondered if this was how teachers experienced my practice. I believed mentoring was an important melody line in my symphonic professional story and wondered if principals

and teachers would have stories that supported the need for this process on their professional landscape. As a researcher, I was curious to hear these stories of others, the stories teachers and a principal told of how their practices have been influenced through the mentoring process.

From the literature on principal as mentor, I became more aware of the many ways principals can mentor others. I realized many of the mentors on my professional landscape were ones who provided me with the opportunity to learn from them, lead or work together as a team. They were ones who cheered, guided and listened as I journeyed on my professional landscape.

Principals as Teachers

In trying to understand how my practice as a principal influenced teachers' practices, I looked to the research literature specifically in the area of instructional leadership to become better informed on how my identity as principal teacher was shaped.

I believed my professional identity was primarily storied as a learner and a mentor. However, occasions did arise when my identity became blurred as I storied myself as a teacher to assist my teachers in professional development activities in order to provide them with new strategies to enhance their professional practice. Much of my research for my master's project focused on characteristics of principals as teachers. Research by Sergiovanni (1995), Blase and Blase (1998a), and Zepeda (1999) showed principals as teachers was an important part of a principal's professional identity.

Ernest Boyer, in his address to the National Association of Elementary School Principals' annual convention on Tuesday, April 11, 1995 described the principal as the lead teacher in a school, a teacher who guided the institution more by inspiration than by directive. I wondered if teachers would story their professional practice as being shaped from the inspired teachings of principals.

Schlechty (1997) indicated the principal was one leader in a context of leadership, a leader of leaders (p. 88). For Schlechty, leader of leaders, also signaled the principal as a teacher of teachers, by providing teachers with developmentally appropriate learning opportunities. He found the perception of the principal as the teacher of teachers was dependent upon a principal's approach to staff development, support for change, and interactions with teachers as they pursued activities that promoted growth. According to McCall (cited in Zepeda, 1999), as the teacher of teachers, the principal must realize:

> the actual process of learning that teachers go through is as important, if not more important, than the teaching they do in the classroom. Students learn only from teachers who are themselves in the process of learning. (p. 23)

In my experience, I found students learn best from teachers who demonstrated a curiosity to know more and a willingness to share what they have learned. As principal, I believed it was important for me not only to encourage but facilitate teacher growth and to provide opportunities for this growth to occur. I wondered if teachers would have stories of how their principals influenced their professional growth and shaped their practice.

Sergiovanni (1995) referred to leadership metaphorically as a set of forces. He described one of these forces, the educational force, as a principal having expert knowledge about

matters of education and schooling. Within the educational force, he believed the principal assumed various identities such as clinical practitioner/teacher and instructional leader. As a teacher of teachers, the principal brought expert professional knowledge to teaching, educational program development, and supervision. The principal diagnosed educational problems; counseled teachers; provided for supervision; evaluation; staff development; and assisted with the development of curriculum. As the instructional leader, and at other times as teacher of teachers, the principal dialogued with teachers on an equal basis on matters of teaching and learning. For Sergiovanni (1995), similar to Schlechty (1997), the overall goal was for principals not only to be a teacher of teachers but leader of leaders (p. 88). In his research, Boyd (1996) found teacher satisfaction with their professional identity depended on perceiving principals as instructional leaders (p. 66).

As leadership capacity developed, Sergiovanni (1995) believed the principal needed to help the school become a community of leaders. He found the power of the principal as the teacher of teachers came from focusing attention of others on the modeling of important goals and behaviours, thereby demonstrating to others what was important and valuable in the school. I wondered if teachers and principals would have stories to share of how their practices had been shaped to include a view of school as a community of leaders.

Ellis (cited in Zepeda, 1999) found effective instructional leaders developed programs based not only on their own personal beliefs and values, but also, based upon:

> their knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of their schools and communities; set high expectations within their schools and enforce them through daily interaction with staff and students; promote collaboration; and cultivate mutual trust among their teachers. (p. 18)

In my experience, as a principal, I believed it was important for me to support learning in a school community by taking into consideration the needs of my school. Each of the three schools where I have been principal had very different needs. In the first school, we had a large population of students with special needs. When we planned school activities, we needed to ensure their inclusion in our activities was appropriate and meaningful. In the second school, parents often had limited financial resources and when planning school activities, we sought grants and donations to cover many of the costs. In the third school, money was very seldom an issue as we had a large population of students, their parents had higher incomes and therefore the types of school activities were more varied and the resources greater than in my previous two. I wondered if teachers would share stories of how their principals had shaped their practices by looking at curriculum expectations as well as the needs of their students.

Zepeda (1999) suggested active participation by principals was a key to meaningful, job-embedded, professional development programs for teachers. He believed if principals valued professional development and participated actively in professional development programs with their teachers, then teachers would also value the programs.

Blase and Blase (1998b) suggested principals, in their role as teacher of teachers, enhanced the professional development of the teachers through:

- emphasizing the study of teaching and learning;

- supporting collaboration among teachers;
- developing coaching relationships among teachers;
- using action research to inform instructional decision-making;
- informing teachers of current trends and issues in education through the distribution of educational journal articles;
- providing teachers with information about and encouraging them to attend workshops, seminars, and conferences related to instruction. (pp. 49 – 50)

Blase and Blase (1998b) found sustained improvement in teaching often hinged on the development of "teachers as learners" (p. 61) and offered the following guidelines for principals who wished to develop their capacity as teacher of teachers:

1. Build an atmosphere and processes of shared decision-making and collective responsibility and a culture of learning,
2. Encourage a commitment to spending time studying outcomes, curriculum, and teaching practice,
3. Provide training in action research,
4. Collectively assess the effects of instruction and the climate of the school,
5. Learn with the staff about school improvement and staff development (pp. 78 – 80).

David used many of the guidelines suggested by Blase and Blase (1998b) and was a major influence in encouraging and facilitating my professional growth. He provided principals in our district with professional development activities and personally facilitated my return to university for my master's and doctoral work, including the opportunity for me to continue my research on a paid sabbatical. I wondered what stories teachers and principals would tell of how their professional growth has been influenced.

I believed it was important for me, as a principal to continually strive to become a better learner, mentor, and teacher. Stories of Grace, Shawna, David and others continued to influence and shape my practice. I continued to search for new practices that would

resonate with me and enable me to become a better principal. Just as my beginning stories influenced my practice, so has the literature discussed in this chapter. The work done by Schön (1983) related to reflective practice was mentioned in many of the books I read. Reading and rereading about the practice of reflection as described by so many provided an awakening for me. As I read, I became more aware of the importance and influence reflection had in shaping my practice. Work by DuFour and Eaker (1998) and Jentz and Wofford (1978) on building learning communities emphasized for me the importance of on-going, continuous learning within my professional landscape. I wondered if teachers' and principals' stories of influence would reflect the importance of learning as well. The influence of mentors on my practice was supported by the work of Daloz (1999), Daresh and Playko (1990) and Healy and Welchert (1990). I believed my reciprocal mentor relationships promoted professional growth and shaped my practice. Would teachers and principals share stories of how their mentorship relationships had influenced them? Literature by Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner, and Slack, (1995); Zepeda (1999); and Sergiovanni (1995) spoke of the principal as the teacher of teachers and the leader of leaders. When I recalled some of my stories of influence, I realized how teaching others how to be leaders also shaped my practice. As I began my research journey, I wondered if my influences as principal as teacher, principal as learner and principal as mentor were ones others experienced in their professional practice as well. Were there other forms of influence that shaped teachers' and principals' stories? To find answers to my wonderings, I look to more stories of influence by listening to teachers tell of how principals have influenced their practice and listening to a principal tell of how teachers have influenced her practice.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

From the Beginning

A year ago, I had an opportunity to complete a personal leadership profile which was analyzed by the National Quality Training Group Inc. located in Edmonton. The feedback I received was thorough and detailed and encompassed many of the traditionally recognized leadership traits. The assessment said I was "a factual and logical person" who "looked at things in a rather direct and straightforward manner." The feedback went on to say my approach can be "analytical" and was done within "the framework of logical facts." I was amazed at their analysis, as I believed it was similar to how I perceived my leadership skills.

When I began to plan for my doctoral research, I spent some time reflecting back on the two-year journey I had just completed in the master's program. I realized I felt most comfortable analyzing quantitative data that included numbers and percentages. However, I knew, from my master's project, these numbers and percentages would limit my understanding of the complexities of what influences teachers' practices on their professional landscapes.

My master's project focused on designing and implementing a professional development plan for teachers. This project was written in a case study qualitative format and better described my findings than any quantitative format would have. And yet, I still felt I lost the individual voices of the participants in my findings. It was when I began my doctoral work, I sensed the only way I could get to the heart of my research question was to

immerse myself in the world of my participants. I spent a great deal of time looking at various types of research such as: phenomenology (Gall, Borg, Gall, 1996), ethnography (Berg, 1998), interpretive research (Ellis, 1998), action research (Caro-Bruce, 2000), and, again, case study (Merriam, 1998). After discussions with colleagues and university professors, I began to realize narrative inquiry was best suited for the purpose of my study. Using narrative inquiry has been a great learning process for me, one in which the stories I heard helped to influence and shape both my personal and professional practice.

Understanding Experiences Narratively

Dewey (1938) believed our experiences are based in personal and social contexts. In Dewey's view, people were individuals who needed to be understood as such, but they could not be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation to a social context. For Dewey, experiences for individuals grew out of other experiences and led to further experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (1992) stated "life is a story we live by" and "people make meaning of their lives through story" (p. 12). In a later book, they (1995) wrote "humans are story-telling creatures who, individually and socially, lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives" (p. 154). Lambert, in Lambert et al.(1995), expressed similar ideas when she found stories "have the power to help define who we are, to foster growth and development, and to help us envision our possible futures" (p. 132).

Studying Experiences Narratively

Goodson (1995) found "narrative methods and storying represent the lived experience of schooling" (p. 89). Stories told in and out of the classroom offer us a unique opportunity to learn about schools. Danzig (1996) elaborated on this position when he suggested "issues related to school culture, personal relations, values and beliefs…take on more meaning …[when]…they are presented in stories of practice" (p. 129).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believed "narrative inquiry is a way of representing and understanding experience" (p. 20). They found "narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance … than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field" (p. 42).

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) agreed that narrative inquiry provided the framework for identifying themes within conversation and illustrating how personal practical knowledge could be used to make meaning of the past and create purpose in the future. In a later book (2000), they wrote the use of narrative inquiry allowed a researcher to "move back and forth between the personal and the social simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future, and to do so in ever-expanding social milieus" (pp. 2-3).

In order to gain meaning from listening to teachers' stories of how principals have influenced their practices, and of how teachers have influenced principals' practices, I again looked to Clandinin and Connelly and their work in narrative inquiry and the use of story. They (2000) wrote a starting point for a narrative inquiry researcher was to compose his/her own narrative. They found "the task of composing our own narratives

of experience is central to narrative inquiry ... [where] ... telling stories of our past ... frame[s] our present standpoints" (p. 70).

The Purpose of My Study

The purpose of my research was to hear teachers' stories of how principals have influenced their practices in and out of the classroom. It was also my intention to hear a principal's stories of how her practices have been influenced by teachers. Fullan (1992) suggested that:

> until we have many more studies which examine holistically the inside-out picture of how the principal does and could manage the 'field' of innovative possibilities facing him or her, we will be restricted in the conclusions we can draw. (p. 83)

In a similar way to Paley's (1990) belief that we can only be "known in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events" (p. xii), Fullan believed the influence principals have on others can only be known if we examine their influences within the principals' professional landscape itself.

By listening closely to the stories teachers and a principal told at the same time as I worked alongside them in their professional landscape, I believed my research provided this broader "holistically inside-out picture" of principals' and teachers' influences that helped to story a greater "field of possibilities."

My two research questions were:

> What stories do teachers tell of how principals have influenced their practices?

> What stories does a principal tell of how teachers have influenced their practices?

Significance of the Study

Eisner (1991), like Fullan (1992), believed we, as educators, must understand life in schools both in and out of the classroom before we can recommend change. Keeping in mind the literature by Clandinin and Connelly (1992, 1995, 2000) and Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1999), Danzig (1996), Barone (2000) and others, I believed to understand life in schools both in and out of the classroom, a narrative inquiry approach was well suited for the blending of theory with practice as I examined teachers' and principals' stories of influences.

Barone (2000) wrote:

> the critical educational storyteller is out to prick the consciences of readers by inviting a reexamination of the values and interests undergirding certain discourses, practices, and institutional arrangements found in today's schools. (p. 193)

However, writing these educational stories to prick the consciences of readers has not been an easy endeavour to undertake. The stories I included at the beginning of my doctoral proposal were the result of two years of work with my advisor, Dr. Jean Clandinin. Granted, many other things were going on in my life during that period, including the fact I was working fulltime as a principal, but I wrote, rewrote, unpacked, wrote and unpacked some more, and narrowed the field of stories to ones I hoped readers would identify with. Although this has often been an arduous and difficult process, I must say that it has been one where I learned many things about my story of who I am as

a principal. Attending to and scripting the stories for my dissertation required long and intensive work on the part of the participants and myself. It was my hope, however, that the stories told by the teachers and the principal in the following chapters would be stories that tapped into the readers' consciences and invited a reexamination of those readers' professional practices within schools as they worked towards improved practice on their professional landscape.

Moving to the Field

Using a narrative inquiry approach, I did my research in the fall of 2001 at one school located in Meadowview, a tiny town, outside of the city I lived and worked in. This participation took place in a school district in which I am not employed. The town of Meadowview was surrounded with acreages and farms. The first part of Meadowview School was built in 1962. Since that time, many additions and renovations have occurred, some of which were completed after I finished my field research. Although a few of the three hundred and twenty students walked to school, most were bussed or driven. The school day began at 8:40 a.m. and ended at 3:15 p.m. A combined junior high and high school was located in the building adjacent to the elementary school and there was a strong relationship between the two school staffs. Due to the location of Meadowview School, staff members were fairly isolated from other elementary school staffs. This isolation, I believe, helped to create a closely-knit group of people. They were a collaborative staff who traveled various distances on a daily basis to and from school. A few staff members lived in the town itself, some lived on surrounding acreages and others traveled from neighboring towns and cities. Several of the staff members car-

pooled together on a regular basis. The teaching staff was composed of fourteen females and two males. Their ages ranged between late twenties to late fifties. Three female teachers and the principal volunteered and were selected to participate in my study.

The Meadowview school day was structured in such a way that students had little time for anything other than school related programs. The first half of the noon hour was filled with activities such as running club, choir, and handbells. Students then used the remaining half-hour for eating lunch.

Before I started my research at Meadowview School, I was concerned that my position as a principal-researcher might carry with it a sense of power or authority that would inadvertently influence the actions of the staff and the stories of my participants. Being cognizant of this potential influence, I chose my words very carefully before contributing to any discussions.

At the beginning of the research period, I worried that I would feel a lack of belonging and perhaps a sense of isolation. However, this concern was soon eliminated. Over the three months I was at Meadowview School, I came to see the school as my home away from home and the staff as my friends and colleagues. I looked forward to my time with staff and students and my feelings of acceptance were affirmed when I was invited to several of their social functions.

I worked along side three teachers who have worked with multiple principals in different school settings and with a principal who also had multiple experiences in various schools. I worked in the school four mornings per week and my daily activities varied depending on whose class I was in that day. At the request of the participants, I was involved in various types of student assessment activities outside of the classroom, one-on-one tutorial work both in and outside of the classroom and assistance within the classroom to help promote student learning. I also had the opportunity to tackle some bulletin board displays and prepare materials for the teachers.

My reflective research involved various forms of collaboration and partnership between myself as a researcher and the participants. According to Schön (1983), a participant reveals "the ways of thinking that he brings to his practice, and draw on [the] reflective research as an aid to his own reflection-in-action …[whereas the researcher] … must gain an inside view of the experience of practice" (p. 3). For me, that "inside view" of practice by being part of the participants' professional knowledge landscape became an integral part of this study.

Composing the Field Text

The field text for this narrative inquiry was composed in the fall of 2001 over a three-month period in and out of three classrooms in a school setting using tools such as observation, dialogue, structured and semi-structured interviews, and reflective journaling. The field text consisted of field notes, transcripts from interviews with each participant, artifacts and journal notes consisting of general observations of the school,

thoughts, and wonderings. My field notes were recorded in a notebook I kept with me throughout the day. These contained observations in the classrooms and parts of conversations I jotted down throughout the morning in order to keep as accurate a representation as possible of what I saw and heard. I described each of these field texts in more detail later. My classroom schedule was mutually agreed upon by the three teachers and myself and each day of the week had a different assignment pattern. Most days, I was with all three teachers in the classroom at various times, however, on one day a week, I assisted in only two of the participants' classrooms.

At the beginning of my research period, prior to the students returning to school, I assisted the teachers in setting up their classrooms, putting up displays, marking lockers and fixing old textbooks. Once the students arrived, I spent most of the first month doing individual diagnostic assessments with them. This proved to be a great way to get to know the students on a more personal level. When I completed the testing, I spent most mornings in the classroom working with students and marking their assignments. The teacher participants frequently left notes for me, outlining their requests for the time I had with them. I also added an additional dimension to my research by volunteering to be the piano accompanist for the school choir and Christmas Concert. This opportunity provided me with a new lens to observe from and provided the Meadowview staff a new awareness of me.

The artifacts I collected during my time at Meadowview included materials such as: pictures from the Hallowe'en parade and pumpkin carving activities; the school

handbook; school and teacher newsletters; a sample of the student agenda; a sample of a teacher's planbook; notes and cards from the participants and other staff members; as well as professional development materials collected during the course of my research period.

Living Alongside

During the research period, I lived alongside the teachers, observing and dialoguing with them both in and out of their classrooms in what Clandinin and Connelly (1995) called "the professional knowledge landscape" of practice (p. 24). They suggested these landscapes are:

> exceedingly complex places with multiple layers of meaning that depend on individual's stories and how individuals are positioned on that landscape, as well as the landscape's own narrative history of shift in values, beliefs and stories. (p. 30)

Clandinin and Connelly suggested working in the professional knowledge landscape "allows for the examination of space, place and time including possibility of diverse people, things, events existing in different relationships" over time (p. 2). By being part of the participants' professional knowledge landscape, I believed I was better able to understand the changing nature of these relationships, as well as, the influence of the various contexts of a participant's practice that contributed to the stories shared by them. I found my participants' professional knowledge landscape changed over time and the meanings they attributed to the stories they shared were largely determined by how the participants constructed what happened in a particular context. Clandinin and Connelly

(2000) found narrative inquirers in the field needed to live and work along side participants and:

> come to experience not only what can be seen and talked about directly but also the things not said and not done that shape the narrative structure of their observations and their talking. (p. 67)

Throughout my time at Meadowview School, I tried to be attentive to what was said or not said as well as what was done or not done and recorded these in my written observations.

Stories of teachers' and principals' practices were told in many locations within a school setting such as in the classroom, the staff room, the hallways, choir and concert rehearsals to name a few. The dialogue that took place within the teachers' and a principal's professional knowledge landscape played an important part in my research by adding an additional dimension to the stories shared by each participant. I believed these conversations helped to build a degree of trust and comfort level with the participants prior to the formal interviews. As well, they provided me with some insight into the participants' experiences and therefore allowed me to use this information as conversation starters in our interviews.

I also had the opportunity to spend time with my participants outside of the school setting. Some of our interactions occurred over meals at a participant's home, walking around the Meadowview community delivering Alberta Teachers' Association fliers, a casual meeting at the movie theatre, attending dinner theatre with the staff and participating in two evenings of cards with approximately twenty people.

By having the opportunity to live along side my participants, both inside and outside of school, I believed I was able to examine my participants' professional landscape from an individual perspective while carefully detailing my "intrusion of place" (Barone, 2000, p. 39) into their lives through my field notes, journaling and tape recorded interviews.

Sharing Stories: Interview Transcripts as Field Texts

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) found it was important to understand how teachers' personal practical knowledge interacted with their professional knowledge landscape. They (1988) described a teacher's practical knowledge as based on the "teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body and in their future plans and actions" (p. 25). For my research, I believed the interview process would allow me to hear stories of how the participants' past experiences were influenced by teachers and principals. As a result, I also believed these stories would lead me to a better understanding of who they were in their place in school. Fullan (1992) said:

> by examining their practices and by critically reflecting on the reasons for them, teachers push themselves to give good reasons for what they are doing. (p. 70)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) supported Fullan's belief that self-reflection, or as Schön calls it–a "knowing-in-practice," was an important way for participants to construct meaning of their lives from their stories. As researcher, I believed I, too, would understand those constructions of meaning better through their sharing and reflecting of stories in our interviews.

Several interviews were scheduled to take place both in and out of the school setting. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) stated the interview was best used to "gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that they can develop insight on how the subjects interpret some piece of the world" (p. 135). Our initial interview was semi- structured to promote contributing and collaborating dialogue. (See Appendix A & B). For three of my participants, the first interview was one where I obtained a short life history – both personally and professionally. For the other participant, Laurie, her life history was not given until the fourth interview. In our first three interviews, Laurie openly shared stories of her professional practice and I did not want to interrupt the flow of our conversations to ask her to reflect on her childhood influences during those times.

The agenda for subsequent interviews was influenced by the discussions that occurred during our previous conversations. Questions were developed, modified, and generated with follow-up probing questions related to my research questions. All of the interviews took place in locations mutually agreed upon by individual participants and myself. These locations included the principal's new office, the assistant principal's old and new offices, the participants' classrooms and one of the participant's homes.

Writing More Stories: Field Notes and Journal Writing as Field Texts

While working within the school landscape, I traveled with my notebook throughout the day. I kept a running commentary of the activities I observed, heard and participated in through point form phrases and my own personal hieroglyphic style I have developed over many years of observing teachers in the classroom. I used this style of shorthand,

primarily so I would not create a distraction for the students while they were working. Although the students were very accepting of my presence, even with numerous explanations, they just could not seem to grasp the purpose of my research and, on occasion, needed reassurance I was not recording their actions for analysis but rather the teachers' practices.

My reflective journal began when I initially storied my thoughts, perceptions and wonderings on a tape recorder as I traveled the forty minutes home each day after the school. I chose to do the tapings because I was able to reflect and ramble and reflect some more while my thoughts were fresh in my mind. I believed recording my thoughts, impressions, feelings and the daily occurrences at the school on my way home helped me to analyze the day's events. This led me to a better understanding of the participants' stories. Once at home, I transcribed these reflections into a reflective journal. I found my written journal not only helped me to clarify my impressions of the day but also helped me to create new meaning for some of my own professional stories. This occurred as a result of reflecting on the participants' stories shared through dialogues and interviews, my observations of their practices and from other situations that occurred on and off the professional landscape. The field notes, interview transcripts, and artifacts collected assisted me in supporting my reflections.

Making Meaning in the Field Texts: Preparing to Write Research Texts

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) stated :

> reflective analysis is a process in which the researcher relies primarily on intuition and judgement in order to portray or evaluate the phenomena

> being studied…It can lead to the discovery of constructs, themes and patterns. (p. 570)

I believed personally transcribing the tape-recorded interviews and field notes collected during my study, although an arduous task, helped me to better understand the stories the participants shared. Listening, writing, rewinding and listening again enabled me to pick up nuances I might have missed otherwise. Over thirteen years as a principal, I found I internalized and reflected more on reports, correspondence and proposals when I composed and edited the documents myself. This became particularly apparent to me when I started to send approximately 150 letters after each progress-reporting period to celebrate student achievement. I found I was able to dialogue with individual students in the hallways about their specific marks and efforts in the core subject areas as a result of this practice. I also believed personally transcribing the research data allowed for a more continuous analysis of data with fewer time lapses which, in turn, allowed me to be better prepared for subsequent interviews and dialogue with the participants.

During my field research, I took notes, wrote a journal and interviewed my participants at great lengths to seek out information that would answer my questions of principal and teacher influence. Once the field texts were done, I sat down and started my data analysis in December. Bristol boards and post-it notes covered the walls of my house from top to bottom. Being that "logical person" who "looks at things in a rather direct and straightforward manner," I knew I was going to need to develop some sort of system for the vast amount of information I collected. Many cups of coffee were consumed as I read my notes over and over again. The post-it notes were moved from one part of the bristol

board to another until I finally had them grouped in some sort of orderly arrangement for each topic shared by each participant. After playing with the post-its and trying to arrange all of my information by topic, I realized I needed to begin in a simpler manner and chose to organize my material by participant. I gave each of my participants their own specific colour of bristol board and then used different types of post-it notes to represent the different types of field text collected – field notes, reflective journal notes and transcripts of the interviews. In order to achieve some semblance of organization, I finally arrived at five topic headings on each bristol board. These were: experience, professional beliefs, personal beliefs, my observations, and stories of influence. As I worked, I saw themes and trends emerging, but something kept niggling at the back of my mind. Something was on those bristol boards, jumping out at me and trying to tell me to pay attention and yet, at the same time, I was completely missing the message being conveyed.

Once I had completed the organization of my data, I spent a great deal of time trying to decide how I was going to write up my findings, presenting my gathered information to the research community in such a way so they would come to know my participants and the stories they told. As much as I tried, I was not able to find what, I believed, was the best way for me to do this.

In early January, I met with Jean, my supervisor, and showed her the work I had done. We talked about some of the dissertations I had read, the ones that spoke to me and those that had not. We also discussed some of the themes I saw emerging from my research.

As I was talking with her, that familiar niggling came back to me over and over again. Jean could see I was struggling with something and she asked me to share my thoughts with her. As I stumbled around trying to find the words that eluded me, she urged me to keep talking and unpacking the "yeah but" problem I was having.

I fought to find the words to describe my dilemma. Finally, with a great deal of urgency, I explained that, even though I wanted to write about the influences principals and teachers had on one another, I believed each of the participants had shared stories about her childhood that gave me a better sense of who she was today. I felt some of the professional practices I observed over the field research period were related to who my participants were as children. And although some of these characteristics had changed over the plot line of the participants' teaching career, I believed to ignore them would be to deny an integral part of who my participants are today.

My belief was supported by the work done by Clandinin and Connelly. They (2000) stated it was important for narrative researchers to create a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. This occurred when a researcher:

> asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations and writes text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, … temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future … [as well as] "the dimension of place within the environment" (pp. 50-51).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) elaborated on these three dimensions by saying the researcher must create a balance between personal and social issues while examining inward or "internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral

dispositions" and looking outward, examining "existential conditions and the environment" (p. 50). Clandinin and Connelly believed it was important for researchers to look at temporal issues because an event was "an expression of something happening over time…[having]…a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future" (p. 29). They also urged the researcher to examine their field texts for place, as participants are part of an environment and therefore part of a context and culture.

I believed using the framework for a three dimensional narrative inquiry space, (interaction, continuity, and situation) assisted me in the examination and analysis of my field texts and helped me when designing questions in response to the participants' stories.

Composing Research Texts

Once I decided to include childhood influences, I then had to decide how I was going to present the information in a way that would allow the story threads or melody lines to come through. I thought about presenting my research by first naming the melody and providing stories and research to support it. That did not work for me for very long because I realized the reader would need to have some fundamental understanding of my participants' professional identities. I decided to break down the stories into three sections – early childhood influences, beginning teaching influences, and other career influences. That only worked for a little while until I realized the stories all blurred into one another and I lost any sense of who my participants were. Finally, I decided to present each participant's stories in their entirety, from childhood to now, so the shaping

of their professional identities was clearer. I then followed up with naming the story melody and providing stories and research to support my research findings.

Over my years as a teacher and a principal, I have come to know I learn best through practical experiences, talking with principal and teacher colleagues, observing them in action, and hearing stories of how they perceived their practices had been influenced by others. I hope the stories shared in my dissertation will assist principals in creating new meaning of their stories and will add new dimensions to who they are in their place in schools.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the ethical standards of the University of Alberta were satisfied, I took the following steps in preparation for my study. The research proposal for this study was reviewed and approved by the University of Alberta Ethics Review Committee. Following approval by the University of Alberta, formal permission to conduct this study was requested from the principal, teaching staff and through the superintendent in the school jurisdiction selected. The nature of my presence in the school and the purpose of my study were explained to all staff members. Informed consent was obtained from those staff members who volunteered. The participants were informed that participation in the research was free and voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time from the research without penalty or prejudice. In addition, the participants were told of the obligations and responsibilities they would assume if they become involved in the

research. The four participants were asked to sign a Research Consent Form that outlined the nature of their participation and responsibilities. (See Appendix C).

The participants in my study were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and with the exception of my name, the name of the school, the names of the participants, the names of any other individual and the names of some cities mentioned in this document are pseudonyms used to protect the participants' identities. Because the construction and reconstruction of the teachers' stories contained self-disclosure, ethical considerations are embedded throughout the study. Identities were masked, some cities and towns were given pseudonyms and some timeframes have been blurred as well. After transcribing the interviews from taped recordings, the interview transcripts were shared with the teachers and principal before they were analyzed. The three teachers and principal had the right to request removal of any parts of the stories they felt uncomfortable in sharing publicly. The negotiated final research text was shared with the participants prior to the research document being shared with the public.

The Structure of the Research Text

Chapters four through seven, introduce my four participants – Penny, Cherie, Laurie and Joanne. I chose to share Penny's story first as she, as the principal, was the first member of the Meadowview staff I contacted. The three teachers' stories follow in no particular order. In each chapter, the participant's narrative account has been written in three sections. The first section addressed my "niggling" and is entitled "Early Childhood Influences." It contains the participant's stories of parents', teachers' and friends'

influences. The section ends just before the participant begins her formal teaching career. The second section, entitled "Influences from the Beginning Teaching Years" includes stories of influences which occurred early in the participant's teaching career. The third section, entitled "Other Career Influences that Shaped Practice" is composed of stories of influence starting from where section two left off to present day. Interspersed throughout each narrative account are interview transcripts, journal writing and field notes made during the research period.

The reader will notice I used quotations to introduce each section of the participants' narrative accounts. I first started thinking about using quotes early in my research. In the past, when I have had the opportunity to speak to groups – whether it be my staff, to a class of student teachers at the university, or to give a wedding toast or a funeral eulogy, I always included quotes related to the presentation that I found meaningful. Earlier this year, as I was researching for a new presentation, I dug out my quotation books and started to browse through them. As I read, I began to think, "Hey! That's Penny they're talking about!" or "Hey, that quote reminds me of Laurie!" or "Wow, they described Cherie to a 't'!" and "Oh, yeah! That's Joanne!" The more quotes I identified with, the more I believed I needed to include them. The quotes I chose to start each section in my participants' narrative accounts are another poignant lens that helped to shape my story of the four women in my study. I share these quotations to honour my participants' professional practice and the stories they shared. The four participants had four very different stories of coming to teaching. Joanne knew, even before she started school, she wanted to be a teacher. Penny decided during her school years teaching would be the

career for her, just as it was for her swimming mentor. Cherie decided at the end of high school through the whim of a teacher's perception, she, too, could and would become teacher. Laurie chose teaching as a second career at the encouragement of a school superintendent.

Chapter eight includes an account of the narrative threads that resonated across all four narrative accounts, the melody line of "support" in the stories and the eight harmonic patterns my participants played to illustrate their meaning of "support." I arrived at the number of eight harmonic patterns by selecting two stories for each participant that told of, what I perceived to be, the greatest professional influence in their practice. Once I selected the stories, I then posted them on bristol board and examined their relationship with one another. It was through this examination I realized their stories related to the melody line of support. I sustained this melody line through the inclusion of research related to my findings. Eight harmony patterns of support are outlined and discussed in relation to the stories of influence chosen. The patterns included: building confidence; giving affirmation; active involvement; promoting professional growth; promoting reflective practice; having a listening ear; having a sense of humour and; the harmonic dissonance chord, lack of support. These harmony patterns were tied over to the research related to each one.

I chose to begin each section of chapter eight by sharing one of my stories related to the melody or harmonic pattern. The remembering of these stories has created many mixed

feelings for me. However, I believed if I was going to truly grow from this research experience, it was necessary for me to risk sharing and reflecting with others.

The final chapter, chapter nine, contains my reflections, wonderings, and discoveries as a result of this wondrous journey.

CHAPTER FOUR - PENNY'S STORY

INFLUENCES FROM CHILDHOOD

Nothing is so contagious as enthusiasm! It is the genius of sincerity, and truth accomplishes no victories without it.
(Anonymous, cited in Pagels, 2000, p. 18)

I planned to make my initial visit to Meadowview School[1] in the early spring. During my first telephone call with Penny, the principal, one of the pieces of information she shared with me was that the school was under major renovations and had been for sometime. As I listened to her talk, all I could envision was the chaos and stress that had been going on in my own school for the past eight months with the air quality concerns. Before we concluded our conversation, Penny and I confirmed the meeting time and date that had been previously arranged through my supervisor, Jean, to discuss my proposal.

I was quite anxious to make sure our meeting went smoothly and decided to make a trial run out to the school on the Saturday beforehand so I would not get lost on the day of my visit. The trip out to Meadowview was a relaxing drive in the country and I was so deep in thought I almost missed the turnoff. I located the school quite easily based on the directions Penny had given me and parked my car in the school parking lot. I got out of my car and walked around the front of the school with a million questions on my mind. Would I be able to present my research proposal in a coherent manner? Would Penny be interested in participating? Would her staff be interested? What happens if I wasn't successful? What happens if I failed to uphold my end of the research contributions? Although thrilled at the possibility of finding a school to do my research in, it seemed like forever as I waited for Wednesday to come.

1. Names of people and some places used in stories are pseudonyms.

However, Wednesday finally did arrive and Jean and I drove out to Meadowview. Chatting most of the way, the time had passed quickly and we arrived before I had a chance to reflect again on the many questions that had been going on and on in my mind for the past four days. Entering the school for our meeting, I noticed the signs of construction all around me. Jean and I found the General Office and I nervously asked to speak with Penny. The secretary, behind the front counter, got up and went to notify Penny that Jean and I had arrived.

Shortly after, a smiling, cheerful lady came out into the General Office and introduced herself as Penny, the principal. She welcomed us to her school and invited us to join her in her office. As we talked, I couldn't help but notice how joyful, lively and enthusiastic she was. Laughter filled our conversations as we sat and discussed the purpose of my visit. My initial impressions of Penny's lively nature were lasting ones and I believed they were confirmed throughout my visit. Penny validated my perceptions during our second interview in November, when she told me people would describe her as "caring" and "full of life" (Interview, October 11, p. 35). Interestingly enough, I had commented on exactly how "full of life" she was in my journal notes early in October (Journal notes, October 10).

Penny was a veteran teacher and administrator who has worked in three school districts over a twenty-three year career. A well-respected educator whose staff "raved" about her, (Journal notes, August 27; Interview transcripts, Cherie: October 11, pp. 21-22, November 8, p. 51; Joanne: October 20, pp. 42-43; Laurie: August 27, p. 10, November

28, p.1, p. 3) she was vibrant (Journal notes-August 27, October 9), exuberant, and easy-going, someone who engaged you in stories about the wonderful world of school on a daily basis. I was curious to learn more about this incredible lady and looked forward to sitting down with her and hearing her story. We arranged to hold our interviews in her office during the school day.

Shifting Back in Time

Penny and I met in her office on the afternoon of October 11th. As with any school office, people were buzzing around and a variety of things were happening when I entered the office to chat with her. One of the grade four students had forgotten to take her insulin and Penny was arranging for an ambulance to take the student to the nearest hospital approximately fifty kilometers away. The student's teacher was asked to accompany the student and arrangements were being made for class coverage. The telephones in the office were ringing and both secretaries were rushing about trying to locate the child's mother or an emergency contact person.

In the midst of all this action, I met a parent from one of my previous schools and chatted with him for a short while. I told Penny we could reschedule our meeting but she said she would be able to meet with me in a few minutes.

With a minimal amount of delay, Penny had everything sorted out and we went into her office for our interview. Over the next two hours, she talked about her life story, shared her passion, her sorrow and on many occasions laughter as she gave me a glimpse of her

life as she was growing up. From listening to her anecdotes from her childhood I believed Penny's passion and love of school started at a very early age. She told me:

> *I grew up in a small town in Alberta. I ... became the youngest child in the family when my younger sister died. She was 4, I was 8. Before she died, I had taken it upon myself to teach her. I loved school. Loved it! I just walked into my grade 1 class and fell in love with my grade one teacher. I just thought she was so gorgeous ... and so beautiful. ... So I'd go home and I'd share this all with my little sister. ... She was almost 4 when she died ... and she could already read. ... I thought that was so rewarding to be able to teach that little girl to read. ... As I ... went through my school years, I was a successful student but I was a brat! ... It started in grade two. The grade two teacher wasn't that nice, sweet grade one teacher I had and ... I started getting the strap. Grade three they gave me the strap five times but by that time I ... had earned this respect 'cuz I was the only one who got to go into the teacher's lounge to get my strap. ... And I was bored.*
>
> *... There was a special needs boy in my grade three class and ... I got to help him a lot and I loved that ... because I'd finish my work and I'd go and help him. But, I think, when I didn't get to help him, then I was looking for trouble! And ... if some kid said, "Hey, Penny, throw me an eraser," well, okay, I'm chucking it across the room. ... I just loved having fun and I think ... that was really a biggie. ... I wanted to have fun and I guess I really didn't understand that my having fun was ... interfering in anybody else's learning. (Interview, October 10, pp. 1-3)*[2]

While I listened to Penny's story, I sensed her love of learning became apparent at an early age. While she talked, I could feel her passion for teaching in every word she said. At this point in our interview, her eyes lit up and the expression in her voice was moving.

Shifting Forward to Today

I saw Penny's love of fun on many occasions throughout her school. The staffroom and hallways frequently rocked with laughter, often initiated by her. Whether she was sharing stories of her own family or her school family, I would listen as she told her

2. Some transcripts have been edited for readability. Most repetitions, laughter and pauses were removed.

anecdotes with care and compassion. I often watched in fascination as she talked about people from their strengths and how she sought the positive in everyone (Field notes, August 27, September 6, September 17, September 25, October 1).

Shifting Back to Childhood

Penny told me her approach to people was shaped largely by a lifeguard who became her mentor in her teenage years (Interview, October 11, p. 3). So huge was this mentor's influence, that Penny decided to become a teacher as teaching was the career path her mentor took.

> *I was never really good at anything, I was never the best student, I was never the best swimmer. I was in swim club, I was in basketball, but ... I was kind of mediocre at all those things but I just loved doing them and would persevere even though I wasn't the best swimmer. ... [I have] really good memories of all those swim clubs and going on the bus to all those meets and bonding with older kids and the lifeguards ... I just idolized them. I thought they were so wonderful so when ... I became a life- guard ... one of my lifeguard coaches ... went in to be a... teacher. ... She was a good six years older than I was ... but I just admired her so much. In fact, she was like my mentor, my idol and after she went to university, she would write me letters so I felt pretty privileged this nineteen year old was writing me letters. ... It just sounded wonderful going to university so I decided I was definitely going to do that. ... So she kind of set my goals for me. (Interview, October 11, pp. 3- 4)*

Penny's stories of her childhood mentors and teachers were incredibly powerful. As she shared them, I felt I was actually reliving them with her. When I asked her how her childhood teachers influenced her practice both as a teacher and as a principal, she was able to give me a definite answer with no hesitation. She told me she believed her childhood teachers taught her about the importance of building relationships, relationships that, she felt, were critical to the success of everyone involved in the school setting.

> *I think it comes down to relationships, because when I think of those people, [they] were very powerful to me. I can't remember what they said to me, I can't remember what I learned from them specifically, but I remember the relationship. I remember them making me feel special ... and they did that by building relationships, by listening and by talking and by encouraging.*
>
> *I knew ... when I walked into a classroom that that's ... what I needed to do with children, was to listen to them and to talk to them and to get to know them and really show I cared. (Interview, October 11, p. 6)*

Later in the interview, she went on to say:

> *I love people telling me good things about myself. So I remember teachers telling me good things about me. I also remember the teachers that told me really bad things about me and I don't think I'll ever really forgive them for some of the things they said about me. (Interview, October 11, p. 27)*

I believed Penny valued the relationships she built with teachers who affirmed her efforts. I thought this affirmation had a significant influence on her and consequently influenced her practices as a teacher and a principal.

Shifting Forward to Meadowview

Penny shared with me her belief about the importance of building and maintaining relationships in her daily practice. Based on her experience with her childhood teachers, she told me she believed it was critical for her to think carefully about the impact of her interactions with others. She told me positive relationships were very important to her and how hard she worked to find solutions to problems that promote a win-win scenario with all of the parties involved (Interview, October 11, pp. 18-22). I saw how staff members positively responded to her because they knew she cared about them and wanted what was best for everyone (Journal notes, September 17). When she talked about dealing with teachers who were experiencing some difficulty, she said:

> *I think, "Okay, you have to understand how this is going to influence your future relationship with this person." Does that mean you never give anybody the bad news? No, but you do it in a caring way. (Interview, November 8, p. 27)*

By using a caring approach, Penny said she tried to facilitate professional improvement for staff members through encouragement, support and guidance. This caring approach carried over to students and parents as well. She told me:

> *These little kids that we just got this week from Costa Rica ... that's real sensitive because ... we don't know much about them ... but my first approach is to always be out there, greet the new parents and welcome and say, "We'll do what we can." and "I know it's hard when you come to a new school." and introduce them, show them around, try to <u>really</u> give them a sense of comfort and that their kids are going to be okay with us. ... I think that has really helped over the years. People know that ... it's a good way to start. ... [We] had the situation where they [the Costa Rican family] told us these kids were in grade one and grade two so we put them in grade one and grade two and we find out their skills are ... really not there. So ... we [had] to approach these parents and say, "We think it's best if we put them back." And [by] talking to the parents and trying to show them respect, ... at the same time listen[ing] to them and show[ing] them respect and [talking] to ... them ... they just seemed so grateful. They're ... saying, "Yes, okay, we trust you to make the right decision. You ... seem to have a beautiful school. You seem to be very caring. We are going to trust that you're going to make the right decision by our kids." And ... they probably will trust us with anything now. Just because the relationship was created right from the very beginning.*
>
> *... [W]hen I think about over the years, that story has repeated itself many times. And I have found that it's such a benefit, that ... no matter what I'm doing, [if] I see somebody new, I'll go and welcome them. (Interview, November 8, pp. 35–37)*

Through my conversations with Penny, I believed her love and passion for her grade one teacher and her lifeguard mentor have shaped her identity in significant ways. Building relationships through listening, talking and by encouraging others was an integral part of who Penny was today. I thought her experiences with her grade two and three teachers and the memories of the hurtful comments made by those and other teachers also

influenced her by fostering an awareness of the impact her words have in her practice.

INFLUENCES FROM THE BEGINNING TEACHING YEARS

I am going your way, so let us go hand in hand.
You help me and I'll help you.
We shall not be here very long...
So let us help one another while we may.
(William Morris, cited in Pagels 2000, p. 53)

In our first interview, Penny told me that following graduation from a university in southern Alberta, she accepted a grade five teaching position in a little town in northern Alberta approximately ninety minutes away from a small urban centre. While listening to Penny share her first teaching story, I began to wonder if her experience in this small rural community had been one of the most significant in shaping her professional identity as an educator. She said:

> *When I graduate(d) (from university) ... I took the furthest (laugh) job in northern Alberta ... and ... it was just wonderful! What a way to start ... a teaching career. ... Most of the people there were young teachers. ... The superintendent would go to St. F. X. University in Nova Scotia and hire the teachers right off campus as they graduated so with all these Nova Scotians and New Brunswick, oh, so many parties but we talked teaching 24 hours a day. It was just ... lived, breathed, and we immersed ourselves in teaching. It was a really exciting time for me.*
>
> *We did ... some neat things like, musically, two people played the guitars and the piano and we'd have music nights and we'd just sit around and sing and I learned all these old English ballads and Nova Scotian songs. Great bonding time, you know, ... I mean, I'd gone through the university thing from leaving home but ... this was really bonding of teaching. I just have such an admiration for teachers and the whole profession. The other people I worked with, the older people, were mostly from England. My principal was and a couple other teachers and ... they were part of the singing group, too. ...So I learned a lot about ... how things are done in England as well ... I was the only one on staff that was from Alberta. (Interview, October 11, pp. 4-5)*

Penny spoke at length about the relationships that were developed within her school. From listening to this story, I believed the enthusiasm of youth, the diversity and sharing of cultures, and the geographic isolation of the community played a large part in facilitating the development of strong, intense professional and personal relationships with her teaching colleagues.

Shifting Forward in Time

One of the first things I noticed when I arrived at Meadowview School was a feeling of community or family. I sensed a high comfort level and strong rapport between staff members as they laughed and joked with each other (Journal notes, June 4, August 27, September 4, September 10, October 2).

As I listened to Penny share the story of her first teaching assignment, I began to wonder how her experience up north influenced her efforts to shape the coming together of her staff.

> *Certainly that was an experience that I wanted to replicate ... because it was so powerful for me and such a good way to get introduced into teaching. ... I think I sought that out. So, in other schools that I went to, I was looking for the same kind of ... relationships. ... [That was] the only place where we all lived there and we needed to be there together. I think, (pause) none of the situations have been the same as that one. (Interview, November 8, pp. 3-4)*

When I asked Penny if there was anything she had taken from her first teaching experience which influenced how she brought her current staff together, she told me:

> *It probably was not a conscious thing because I don't remember ever thinking [about it]. ... I <u>just</u> want people to get along together and ... enjoy each other and ... perhaps what was in the back of my mind was that*

> *worked really well there. And I do try to encourage those [relationships]. (Interview, November 8, p. 5)*

As Penny shared her experiences of teaching with me, she frequently spoke about her belief in the importance of strong relationships among staff members. For me, I felt the relationships Penny referred to, not only spoke of the bonds and relationships people establish but she also created for me an image of a school that facilitated the development of community within the professional landscape. In other words, while Penny told her stories of school, I visualized relationships where the interaction between two or more people helped to create a sense of community where strong bonds were encouraged for all staff members on that landscape.

Penny compared her school up north to her current school, Meadowview, in the following way.

> *This one's [Meadowview] like that in that we really love to have fun together and we really like to be together but we don't live here or most of us don't live here. We live ... all over. (Interview, November 8, pp. 4-5)*

I believed Penny valued the development of collegial bonds as an integral part for the successful working of her school.

During my research period at Meadowview, I witnessed Penny's continuous effort to promote relationships and bonding within the school. A personal example of this occurred at the Meet the Teacher evening held one week after school started in early September. With Penny's permission, I attended the evening's presentation and sat with

the staff members who were seated in the first three rows of chairs. After a welcome to the parents, Penny asked the staff to come up to the front to be introduced. As staff members came forward, I remained seated in my chair. Once at the front of the gym, several of the staff members called out for me to join them. When Penny heard their shouts, she summoned me on the microphone, too, saying I needed to be up at the front because I was part of the staff as well. In my journal, I wrote about how truly touched I was that staff members already considered me as being part of their professional landscape (Journal notes–September 6).

Sliding Backwards in Time to a New School Setting

After teaching up north for a while, Penny decided to take some time off to travel through Europe. She intended to return to her teaching job in northern Alberta where she had met her future husband. However, when she came back early November, her future husband had moved to Edmonton and Penny decided to look for a job somewhere close by. She told me:

> *I really lucked out. ...There was an ad in the paper for a grade one teacher in Deckville. ... What had happened is that they had two heavy enrolled classes and they were going to make a third class. ... I remember that interview like it was yesterday because, [the principal] was asking me questions about teaching kids to read and I was going "Oh, ya, I can do that. Ya, no problem" thinking "How the hell do you do that?" (laugh) I had no ... idea how you would even begin, didn't matter what my courses had been, I had no idea! But I got the job and I just loved it. I think there's nothing more rewarding than teaching grade one. (Interview, October 11, p. 6)*

From listening to her stories, I believed, even though Penny did not have the experience to teach grade one, her enthusiasm and passion for teaching were probably the selling

point for the Deckville principal to hire her. I think these narrative threads of enthusiasm and passion run through her life beginning with her earlier childhood stories of school.

Shifting Forward to Meadowview Today

In my research journal, I noted Penny's enthusiasm and passion for school and how she motivated staff members in the staffroom and throughout the school, by showing a personal side of her as well as a professional side. She often shared personal stories with the staff including anecdotes related to her university course work, church activities and her family (Journal notes, September 17, September 25, October 1). In our interview, Penny told me how she valued the opportunity to share her personal stories with her assistant principal, Elaine, whom she described as her "calm in the storm" (Interview, November 8, p. 12). She told me:

> *I can tell her things about my kids that I wouldn't tell other people because ... I would think they would think something bad about my child and remember that. ... But she ... doesn't, she just, "Oh, well, you know, it is that year and that time." and "Yes, she did that but remember the time you told me about when she did this?" and "Oh, last week Penny, it was the other one you were upset about." (laugh) (Interview, November 8, p. 16)*

I believed Penny felt sharing personal stories provided her staff with a better understanding of who she was – both professionally and personally. I also believed she recognized and acknowledged how important personal stories were in shaping our professional identities.

To help promote her staff's understanding of her professional identity, Penny also shared past classroom experiences to create an awareness that she understood how difficulties

could occur within the classroom in spite of a teacher's skills. She shared one such story with me:

> *I had a little boy, grade one ... [Barney] ... [who] was raised by Hell's Angels. He was quite a wild little character and I had a real hard time with him in class, trying to get him to behave. ... I really didn't like having him in my classroom ... [and] would have liked to have gotten rid of him. But ... I realized that he was just a little kid in grade one, too, and he ... needed somebody to care about him. ... I remember him being so disruptive and yelling and screaming. ... One time he was standing on top of his desk and looking at me like, "Gonna do something about this?" And he's swinging his foot ... and I thought, "Ohhhhh, I wonder if he's going to kick somebody?" So I went over and I took his hand and I said, "Barney, I'm really glad you didn't kick anybody with your foot." And he kind of looked at me ... and then I just brought him down and sat him down and ... he came with me. (Interview, November 8, pp. 28-30)*

I believed Penny's willingness to share her stories of classroom challenges created an openness and vulnerability which facilitated the building of trusting relationships with her staff. I also believed Penny saw the interconnectedness between the professional and personal lives of her staff members and the importance of encouraging her staff to share both sides of who they were – in other words, the whole person. I thought her use of personal and professional stories promoted relationships, a connectedness for the staff at her school which helped to form a sense of school community.

Moving Back to Deckville

I asked Penny if a sense of school community had existed in her second teaching assignment in Deckville.

> *That [feeling] wasn't really there, ... but ... what came out of that was probably ... some of the best friendships I ever made ... so, we did that instead. ... I never felt... completely accepted there. It was a French-English community and I always felt that when ... the staff started talking French, they were shutting us out. ... I don't think that's what their intention was but that's what I felt, that ... you are no longer part of this*

> *conversation. So there were those kinds of feelings and because it was a bedroom kind of community, we didn't all live there. (Interview, November 8, p. 4)*

As she told of her experience at Deckville, Penny highlighted the importance of the variety of relationships that existed within a school community. She shifted forward to share an example of two such different types of relationships she has within Meadowview School.

Along the Temporal Dimension to Today

Central Office personnel, within the school district that Meadowview School was located in, were aware of the aging population of administrators and the impending need for new administrators. As a result of this awareness, the school district set up a leadership/mentorship program for schools interested in promoting this type of activity. Two of Penny's staff members, Cherie and John, have had an opportunity to participate in this program over the past two years. Penny shared the following with me:

> *Cherie and I have been friends for a long time as well as ... colleagues. ... Our daughters are the same age as well and they play hockey together so we have lots of links and ties. But ... it was really nice to get <u>that</u> much time to talk to her, you know. We really ... firmed up that bond even more. And what I learned from that was ... whenever you're talking to people and discussing ideas, you firm up or reconsider what you are thinking.*
>
> *... John has some wonderful leadership qualities as well. So I thought it would be really good to work with him. John and I get along great, we're ... good friends. John has shared with me ... his marriage break-up probably more than he has anyone else...So, we still will talk about our personal stuff ... (pause) but not as much as Cherie and I would ... I'll say, "Okay, what do you think about this?" ... or he'll ask questions. And I'll say, "What do you want to know more about?"*
>
> *It's interesting that he wants to know more about things like budget and process and policy whereas Cherie is more [interested in] decision-making. (Interview, November 8, p. 47)*

As I listened to Penny talk, she spoke of building school relationships by using an overlapping of experiences and interests so there was a connectedness between the people with whom she worked. I thought Penny believed, through finding the personal or professional commonalties among people, she was able to promote what I saw as a sense of community within her school or what she talked about as "bonded relationships."

One of the ways Penny promoted relationships between herself and staff members in her school was through the notes she wrote to staff members recognizing their efforts and achievements. Cherie, Joanne and Laurie all spoke about the impact her notes have had on them (Interviews, Cherie: October 11, p. 51; Joanne: October 20, p. 45, Laurie: November 28, p. 1). I asked Penny to share the story of why she started this practice.

> *That was from a ... principal I had when I was in Deckville. ... She did that after we did report cards. She always collected our report cards, she read them, and then she wrote us a note. And she would comment not just on the report cards but other things and it just made me feel so good. [It] is such a big job, doing those report cards, and to have face-to-face acknowledgement that I had done something well was a real up lifter to me. (Interview, November 8, pp. 37-38)*

I believed Penny recognized how important it was for her to be acknowledged and valued as a teacher and how greatly these positive notes affected her. They affirmed she was doing a good job and her efforts were appreciated. I believed she was determined to continue the practice of affirmation notes when she got into leadership because she felt they made a difference to her, as a staff member, to receive recognition and feedback. As well, I believed the notes she wrote acted as another strategy she could use to facilitate bonding relationships. She told me:

> *So when I ... started this position, I thought, "I'm going to [write notes], too" because I know how important it was to me. It's hard now that I've*

> *been doing this for so long because I'm saying the same things over and over again about the same people ... and I find it really hard ... to try and come up with newer things to say. You know, how ... you kind of have your own patterns about things you focus on? ... I find my studies help me with that 'cuz they get me excited about something else or get me looking at other things and then I'll comment on those kinds of things. (Interview, November 8, p. 38)*

Penny worked hard to validate her staff members' classroom practice, contributions to the school and the efforts made towards supporting others and by doing so further promoted the development of relationships she valued in the work place.

Shifting Back in Time to Deckville

Penny taught grade one at Deckville for six years and then decided she needed a change so she taught grade six for a year. By that time, she was married and had her first baby. She and her husband began looking for land and ended up living near the town of Meadowview (Interview, October 11, p. 6).

Penny enjoyed being at home with her first and then second baby. However, finances were such that she returned to teaching as a substitute teacher. She substitute taught at Meadowview a couple of times but spent most of her time subbing in a small community nearby. She filled in for several maternity leaves and short term assignments and eventually taught grade seven for part of a year. She told me she found teaching grade seven very frustrating as she was unable to build the kinds of relationships with her students and the staff that she valued. She said:

> *Never again. The relationship building was so difficult because I only saw some of those kids forty minutes a day. I came in part way through the year, replacing another teacher which is so difficult to do and was faced with a group of kids who could have cared less about learning. Some of*

> *them really wanted to do well, ... but these kids were sneaky about it as well. They would hand in their papers after class so nobody would see them.*
>
> *It was the most incredible experience, I just couldn't get over it. It wasn't until the end of that year that I felt I bonded with those kids and that was only because we went skiing together and we could goof around...but I thought, no, this isn't for me. I like the atmosphere of an elementary school where you build relationships. I felt that was so important. (Interview, October 11, p. 7)*

From our conversations about junior high schools, I believed Penny experienced a similar feeling to the one I had throughout my junior high experiences. We both found working with students for such a short instructional period during the day made it difficult to establish the types of relationships that were meaningful for each of us. However, I think she worked towards establishing a stronger relationship than traditionally seen in junior high school, by supervising extra-curricular student activities such as skiing as well as providing students with the opportunity to have fun outside the classroom. This enabled her to begin to establish a bond between herself and her students. Penny's narrative thread of building relationships based on the whole person, personal and professional, which first arose in her first teaching experience, was now an important part of her building relationships with students.

Moving Forward to Meadowview Today

Two incidents occurred during my time at Meadowview School which emphasized Penny's continuing efforts to establish bonds with the people in her school. The first incident related to me. As I mentioned earlier, Penny asked me to join the staff at the front of the gym at the Meet the Teacher night. By this time, I had only been at the school for six days. She chose to introduce me first, something she had done on a

previous occasion when the elementary and junior-senior high school staffs shared a back to school luncheon. She started by explaining to the parents that I was a doctoral student from the university and I would be working with the staff as part of my studies. She then went on to acknowledge, in great detail, my efforts and contributions to the school already. Words could not express how overwhelmed I was at her kind words. I went home that night trying to remember if I had ever, in my twenty-four years as an educator, felt as valued as I did that night. Time and time again, during my three-month research period, the positive recognition and appreciation for my contributions to the classrooms were verbalized and acknowledged by Penny. Her affirmation of my work was one of the strongest memories I have carried away from my research studies.

The second incident occurred at a staff meeting in November. As part of her staff meetings, Penny included "bouquets" at the end of the meetings. At this particular staff meeting, the program aides were lauded and thanked for their contributions to the school community. Many of the program aides commented on how important it was to hear those words from other staff members. The narrative threads of bonding and relationship building between herself and others continued to be evident in both of these stories.

Moving Back in Time to her Beginning Meadowview Experience

As a result of Penny's efforts as a substitute teacher, she was hired, on a part-time basis at Meadowview School, to replace Cherie who was going on a maternity leave. Penny quickly established a strong relationship with her students and their parents. A turning point in her life occurred in May of that year.

> *I started in December ... eleven years ago. ... That was a traumatic year. (sigh) I was sharing the class with another teacher. (pause) In May, Mother's Day, I was sitting at home on our acreage outside of town here, I got a phone call that a little boy ... in my class had died. It was a real horrible, tragic accident where the whole family had ... (pause) stopped at a farmyard to help with a grass fire (pause). The gas tank exploded, and the fireball whipped across the yard and landed on this family. All three children were burned to death. William and Jane, who were in grade one and two died there, that day. And the mother was very badly burned as well. HORRIBLE, just horrible! And I think it wasn't just grieving for William, now that I look back on it. I grieved everything at that moment. I couldn't believe that everyone could just go on here and continue, and pretend nothing was wrong. ... I couldn't believe the kids could laugh and play outside. I was so devastated. I started going to a counsellor at that time, and my marriage was not doing well and I think ... I was grieving my marriage, I was grieving my little sister, I was grieving my grandmother. I went through a really, really hard time. (Interview 11/10, pp. 9-10)*

Penny was very emotional as she shared this story with me and I could feel the intensity of her pain. This was a time when several of the relationships she valued, both personally and professionally, were breaking apart. I believed her acute pain also caused her to reflect on other treasured relationships that she had lost in the past. I thought her experiences during this period of time caused Penny to develop an even greater appreciation for the importance bonding relationships played in her daily practice.

Continuing on with the Beginning Years at Meadowview

Penny's principal at Meadowview School, Keith, was a man who Penny described as always looking for new ideas to bring to his school and staff (Interview, October 11, p. 12). A month after the tragic incident with her student, William, Keith approached her with a unique proposal. By moving some of the other teachers to new grade assignments, he found he was in a position to hire additional staff. I believed he recognized the

outstanding qualities Penny brought to the classroom and asked her if she would like to continue on to grade two and three with the class she had. She told me:

> *I was just so excited about that. So ... I started fulltime then and ... just had a wonderful experience with these kids, just loved it! (Interview, October 11, p. 10)*

I wondered why the principal asked Penny, in particular, to carry on with this class and if that experience influenced who she was as a teacher and a principal. She said:

> *I think so. Just the fact that he asked me, (pause) to me was a real vote of confidence. ... I think ... it was an interesting idea to him because he was an ideas man and he liked to explore new ideas. ... He saw the opportunity because ... Cherie was coming back from her maternity leave so I wouldn't have had a job. ... He thought of this idea and he was able to accommodate it and I ... fit the bill. (Interview November 8, pp. 7-8)*

I asked her how she saw herself as "fitting the bill" and she told me:

> *I think he saw me as somebody who was very flexible, somebody who could learn something very quickly, who wasn't stagnant. ... And he also saw me as new blood because I wasn't a part of the established community here when he first took over ... so, I didn't have any preconceived ideas. But, I think ... he saw me as somebody who was very flexible. I had subbed ... and then done this short term [assignment] and ... [he] and I [had] talked about taking on grade one 'cuz I think he saw grade one as probably the hardest grade to teach. And ... he was quite impressed that that was not something that ... bothered me or scared me. that, I wanted to [carry on with my] grade one [class] and ... as soon as he approached me with the idea, ... I just said, "Oh, I just love that idea! That sounds wonderful!" I already had such a good relation with those kids. ... I think, the parents had gone to him, too, and said, "She's a good teacher. Keep her." So he saw that ... as a positive as well because ... we could step into the second year: same set of parents, same kids, the idea being we could just pick up where we left off. There wasn't the transition time and hopefully we could get right into the schoolwork. (Interview, November 8, pp. 8-9)*

I believed the importance Penny placed on relationships had a major influence on Keith and his asking her to take this assignment. As she said in our interview, she had already established a bonded relationship with the students and parents and the parents had been

vocal in expressing their appreciation for Penny's teaching qualities. I also sensed Penny appreciated the principal's confidence in her skills as a teacher and as someone who could influence these children in a unique and powerful way by teaching them over a three-year period.

Penny went on to teach her class for the next two years. While working with this group in grade three, the vice-principal position became available and her principal encouraged her to apply. She shared the following information with me about why she decided to apply for the job.

> *When I was teaching grade three Keith asked me ... to apply for ... the position of vice-principal. So, I did halftime grade three and halftime vice-principal ... for two years. At that time, I had left my husband so I figured I needed the extra money. ... I knew ... I liked being a leader. I'd always liked that, ... but ... that wasn't really my motivation at that time, 'cuz , if I could have had my druthers, I would have been ... home with my kids. But the circumstances were that I couldn't do that. (Interview, November 11, p. 11)*

From Penny's story, I again saw the narrative thread of how much she valued relationships particularly when she shared she would rather have been at home with her own children if it had been possible. From listening to Penny talk about her children over the time we spent together and from the story she told, I believed Penny valued the relationship she has with her children as the most important of all.

After Penny had spent two years as vice-principal, Keith left on a one-year leave. Without prior consultation, the school district told her she would be acting principal and she found she was in a position to hire an acting assistant principal. Two staff members applied and Penny hired Elaine, a teacher who provided calmness or stability, an "ear to

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listen" and organizational ability which complimented Penny's strengths as a principal (Interview, November 8, p. 11).

As an administration team, Penny and Elaine brought about change in Meadowview School. Although Keith was a change agent, it appeared he often did this in ways that left people feeling intimidated. Penny talked to me about the impact her new position and the new administration team had on the staff.

> *It's been nine years, because ... Keith didn't come back so then we [were made] permanent. We loved it! We loved it that first year. We thought this was great! Keith [had been] a real motivator in some ways. ... He was a real change agent. ... He was always ... an idea man and I think that was good in lots of ways but there [were] ... lots of sour tastes in peoples' mouths, too, so (pause) [the staff] started to feel more comfortable with me. A lot of people ... felt very (pause) intimidated by ... Keith and so [staff felt] some relief and then the second year went [by],and they were just coming back and saying "This is so good, we like this so much, we can approach you. We can talk to you and we don't have ... what we used to call, the 'flavor of the month', ... another innovative thing that we were supposed to buy into and that [isn't happening now]." (Interview, October 11, pp. 11-13)*

In her beginning experience as a principal, I heard Penny speak again about the importance of establishing supportive collegial relationships. In the final story of this section, she talked about changing the environment of Meadowview School from one where staff members felt intimidated and unable to approach the principal to one where staff members felt they could talk to the principal and feel comfortable about doing so.

Penny's beginning teaching stories all contained the narrative thread of the importance of relationships; relationships that allowed for the sharing of personal and professional stories; relationships where staff members felt the principal was approachable and

relationships where people could have fun. These relationships were further strengthened when bonds were created through people feeling valued and having their ability validated in some tangible way.

I believed the relationships Penny referred to were similar to the relationships Covey (1989) discussed in his book. He said relationships were built on trust and demonstrate a credibility for "open, mutual learning and communication and real creativity" (p. 220).

OTHER CAREER INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED PENNY'S PRACTICE

> *The basic role of the leader is to foster mutual respect and build a complementary team where each strength is made productive and each weakness made irrelevant.*
> *(Covey, cited in Blaydes, 1998, p. 43)*

Moving Forward on the Temporal Landscape to Today

When Penny and I had opportunities to sit down and talk, I often felt like we were kindred spirits. Many of our early life and teaching experiences paralleled each other and as we talked about her current place on the professional landscape of school, I believed we saw the principalship through similar lenses. Penny talked to me about her beliefs about the principalship. She said:

> *I believe (pause) this is a shared leadership and anything I say that I think is a great idea, I can share it with you. But if you don't think it's a great idea it doesn't mean that it's going to go anywhere! ... I'm not the one ... in the classroom, teaching the kids.*
>
> *So, that's ... what (pause) I ... believed right from the beginning. Then, taking my master's has really helped me ... firm up those beliefs about what I do believe in. (Interview, October 11, pp. 12-13)*

As Penny shared her beliefs, I sensed she was again talking about the relationships that developed within a school. I believed she valued staff collaboration and recognized the promotion of teamwork as an important component of leadership.

I asked Penny to elaborate on her philosophy of leadership for me. She told me:

> *I see [the principalship] more as leadership ... (pause) setting the tone but also encouraging and helping people to do the best that they can and bring out the leaders in [each of] them. Like John's ... led us in loads of ways and so has Cherie and so has Mary. Mary puts on school-wide activities that are just incredible. ... And Margaret certainly takes a lot of leadership and so everybody does to ... a certain extent. Everybody has a leadership role and rises to the occasion. (Interview, November 8, pp. 46-47)*

As Penny talked, I was reminded of the many examples of teamwork I witnessed formally and informally during my time at Meadowview. I believed her staff members demonstrated their support for each other by either getting actively involved in an activity (such as the cross country club) or by providing their assistance in a non-direct way (covering classes for the cross country coaches) to enable the activity to be successful (Journal notes, October 2).

Penny talked to me about this sharing of practice and workload. She said:

> *I believe strongly in Barth's [work] about ... sharing of practice and (pause) sharing the workload. ... I've been trying to give teachers opportunities to [talk about their practice with others.] I think it's so important and I think that we need to do that within our school mostly, but we also need to do it outside of our school. And ... I think principals really need ... to encourage that kind of [interaction] instead of this exclusive me, me, me, my, my, my. (Interview, October 11, p. 20)*

I saw Penny practice her beliefs of shared practice and shared workloads by involving her staff in many of the opportunities provided through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). She validated my perceptions when she told me:

> *I think one good thing that has happened out of AISI is some lead teachers have been designated for different [subject] areas ... like [having lead teachers in] our phys. ed. program. This is something new we're doing this year. The [district] lead teacher really encouraged us with that and Cherie and...Tina went over [to her school] ... and spent half a day with her ... (pause) I've always told the teachers, whatever you hear or whenever ... you have a friend that teaches over in Devon or wherever, you go. That's great p.d. Go spend a day with them. My best friend is a principal in Olds and ... I took two teachers and we watched how they do a "community of learners" program and the teachers brought it back ... and ... they [have] used some of those ideas as well. (Interview, October 11, pp. 20-21)*

I believed Penny encouraged her teachers to develop their areas of strength and offered to provide support to enable them to participate in these opportunities. However, she and I have come to realize staff members were more willing to take part in inter-visitations when they felt it is not an additional time commitment for the principal. She said:

> *I definitely try to encourage ... them to go and see each other but they very seldom do. (pause) And I think it's because I'm saying I will ... come in to your class while they do that and they just think I'm too busy. They don't want to ask me to do it. (Interview, October 11, p. 21)*

From watching and listening in the school, I believed Penny's staff had such great respect for her and the work she did, they hesitated to ask her to give more of herself. I wondered if the same would be true if this type of relationship did not exist between a staff and their principal.

Penny found another way to promote the development of a community of learners in her school through the initiation of grade-level meetings. I heard several of the teachers

mention their meetings in passing and asked Penny to tell me more about the idea. She said:

> *I'm really pleased with how that's working out. A few years ago, we started the ... grade level meetings. [It] came out of my belief that we didn't get enough time to talk to each other.*
>
> *...We free up both the grade level teachers at the same time and ... we [combine] the two classes. So, combining the two grade one classes, and I was going in or ... trying to (pause) timetable someone else to take care of that class while those two teachers could meet ... at least two or three times a month.*
>
> *...[So the teachers meet] for half an hour period. Sometimes we will say in the staff meeting, this is something we really need to talk about at the grade level meeting and come back with. ... Then ... there's sometimes where we want to combine [grades.]... [For example,] we have an AISI lead teacher coming to talk to us about ICT's [Information and Communication Technology skills] and how to implement them. ... [It is] just some more time for teachers to sit together and discuss [educational topics]. (Interview, October 11, pp. 22-24)*

I believed Penny valued the importance of collegial sharing and has been able to put this belief into practice through the grade-level meetings she initiated. Through her support, directly by supervising classes and indirectly by providing support staff members to relieve the teachers, the Meadowview staff has been able to participate in a practice of collegial sharing I believed is lacking in many schools.

Penny went on to discuss with me the influence she perceived teachers have in schools. She said:

> *I've really noticed ... teachers are powerful people and they don't even understand their power. (laugh) They don't understand that, if they, (pause) ... believe in something, how much, how big of changes they can make. Or if they resist something, how they can make it not work. (Interview, October 11, p. 14)*

I was curious to know more about Penny's perceptions regarding the power teachers had and I asked her if she could share a story to better help me understand. This was what she told me:

> *One family we had ... [was] quite a poor family. There were six children in the family (pause) and very deprived background. We were very concerned about them as far as nutrition and cleanliness and ...(pause) getting enough emotional support. ... The teachers ... took [these children] under their wing, (pause) and made life changes for them. I don't ... think [the teachers] realize how powerful that was ... (pause) ... even though the family .. .left the area, they still make connections ... with some of the people. I just ... feel that [the children] were given some life skills about loving and caring and ... because they were treated with respect, these kids were able to learn. ... They ... were all special needs kids, but they did learn to read and they did learn to function in basic math and things. And I ... believe that's because this group of teachers just never gave up on them. ... In that way, I feel that teachers are so powerful because their decisions really can make life changing effects on children. ... The little boy, Robert was totally out of control behaviour-wise when we got him. ... We couldn't keep him sitting down, he was very hard on the other kids. There was another family that wanted him removed from the school because he had broken a little girl's finger and he was just constantly biting, scratching, jumping, you know, just like a little wild animal ... but it just seemed to me that the teachers really worked with him. We did finally get a t.a. to work with him, too, ... and she ... just made a connection with him and he became a very caring kind of a person.*
>
> *This little Robert, he's still making contact with the t.a. He'll phone her every once in a while and like he's, (pause) he's got to be fifteen or sixteen years old now. ...To me that was just so significant 'cuz we had him for three or four years and he went from being such an (pause) out-of-control child too.*
>
> *But, you know, even though ... the family was so important, I think ... our teachers really struggled with that, too, because they felt the ... kids should be taken away from the parents. ... They weren't great parents, but, (pause) (sigh) ... there was such a sense of family about them even though it wasn't a great situation. They had real strong ties to each other and they didn't want to be taken away. ... I think I learned a lot from that too, that that's not always the best answer. But ... even within a bad background situation, ... what we can give them ... are very good skills for ... stepping [into] other places. (Interview, November 8, pp. 1-3)*

As Penny told me this story and knowing some of the staff members involved, I could easily visualize the nurturing and care given to these children. I believed this nurturing and care was not given because the teachers had to, but rather because that was who these teachers were.

My belief was further validated when I asked Penny if the teachers' involvement with this family was a school initiative or whether each individual teacher took it upon his/herself to reach out to the children. Penny told me:

> *I think it was each individual teacher. I don't think it was a planned approach. But I think that just speaks to the culture of the school. ... I mean there's certainly no direction from me, this was before I was principal. It was just something that they do because (pause) that is the culture of the school, that they care about these kids and ... they don't give up on them and they're gonna keep trying. (Interview, November 8, p. 2)*

I believed Penny was accurate in her perceptions of her school culture. Many times before school and at recess I would hear teachers talking about their students and their families. Quite often they would share information to assist other teachers in understanding what was happening for the family at that particular point in time. Whether it was a family illness, some sort of family turmoil or a reason to celebrate, this information enabled teachers to have a better sense of their students (Journal notes, September 17, September 25).

Penny shared with me how she believed the behaviour teachers modeled influenced how students interact with each other. I asked her to clarify her beliefs for me. She told me:

> *I really believe that adult relationships filter down to the kids. I really believe that when they see good adult relationships ... and hear the laughter and hear the sharing or see that, that is such an excellent model*

> *for ... the kids. And we encourage [those types of relationships] with the kids as well. And I think it's really based on respect. You know, that's really the bottom line, you have to respect them. And ... you try ... to teach people that and live it yourself. (Interview, October 11, p. 26)*

I believed Penny consistently modeled the type of positive interaction she valued with other adults. During my time at Meadowview, I noted how positive the staff members were with each other and how they valued each other's efforts (Journal notes, September 4, September 10, October 2).

Penny demonstrated a poignant example of her belief in the power of modeling prior to our first interview. Early in October, I heard several teachers talk about a speech Penny had given at their staff meeting about respect and how impressed they were with her message, a message they said, came from her heart (Field notes, October 11). I asked Penny if she would share what she had said with me. She told me:

> *When I sat down to this (gestures to staff meeting speech), you know, here, I squared it off: respect, respect, respectful...Do you want me to read it to you 'cuz that's how I had to do it because I thought if I don't put it down ... I will forget to say these things. So, I said:*
>
> > I can only say these things I feel I need to say because of the great RESPECT I have for each and every one of you. Over the years, I think we have built the kind of rapport where we feel comfortable enough with each other that even the HARD things can be said. A couple of you were able to come to me last week with some hard things to say to me and they inspired me to let you know what's bothering me even though it may be uncomfortable.
>
> *And I'm saying this, too, because we congratulate ourselves an awful lot. We're saying, "Oh, we're great. We're good. We're good. We get along so good." We do that a lot. It's kind of that whole culture of the school that we say that.*
>
> > My basic premise in education is about building relationships. Back to RESPECT, which is what this is

really about. I, we preach respect to the students. It's in our mission statement and in our rules.

It is vital that all the adults in this school model that respect. I think we are basically very respectful of each other and of children, but we (and I am including myself) sometimes are not respectful of the parents of some of our children. Some of our talk and comments are derogatory and display a real lack of understanding.

When we received a letter like the one we got from Debbie Black, it makes us realize how important working cooperatively with parents is----the child is the real winner! Of course, not all parents are as easy to get along with and as supportive as Debbie was.

However, I truly believe that ALL parents truly love their children and try to do the best that they can.

Because you all really love and care about kids, it really sticks in your craw when parents do or don't do things that you may not feel are in the child's best interests. However, we seldom know the whole story or all the circumstances.

As well, we all are very blessed with a certain degree of intelligence and none of us are living in a poverty state. Often our parents are coming from terrible circumstances that are beyond their control. If we roll our eyes and consider them "one of those," we aren't opening ourselves up to really helping their children. We need to remember that many of them are doing the best they can with what they have.

Many of us speak of our belief in "Public Education." Doesn't that mean that we truly believe that our school is for ALL CHILDREN no matter what race, intellectual functioning, economic level or emotional home base they come from? It is sometimes hard for us middle-class citizens to see the world through these poor people's eyes but if they see us as the adversaries, certainly these young children will be the ones to lose. We will all gain more by helping and supporting these parents.

Am I saying we can't come into the staffroom and vent? Absolutely not! I am just asking all of us to be more

> careful about judging some of the parents who may live in really unfortunate circumstances.
>
> We worry sometimes about what parents say about us. What message do we give about some of them? Parent bashing should be no more popular than teacher bashing. *(Interview, October 11, pp. 27-29)*
>
> (A revised written copy of this speech was given to me at a later date)

I believed Penny valued what was best for children and recognized parents were an integral part of any school. I was impressed she included herself in her speech as someone who needed to be reminded about respecting the parents and not judging them. I sensed she included herself so staff would not perceive her speech as a lecture but rather a gentle reminder to be aware of how perceptions of parents can influence their practice.

I was curious to know her message had influenced staff members in general. She said:

> *Well ... people said to me, "This is nothing new. This is nothing that we haven't heard before." But some people did. Some t.a.'s were excellent, they came up and said, "You know, we needed to be reminded of this." And some teachers did as well, they said, "That's good, We need that. We needed that." ... I really want [the support staff] to be more respectful, too. It's not just the teachers. (Interview, October 11, p. 30)*

I believed Penny realized the types of relationships she valued were based on mutual respect and trust. I think her speech was a way to remind all of staff members of what those relationships meant to her and how important they were on the school landscape.

During my time at Meadowview, I heard staff members talk about Penny's powerful influence (Field notes, August 27, October 9, October 11) and I was curious to know about the teachers who influenced her practice. She shared with me:

Okay, a teacher who's influenced my practice? (pause) So many ... and in some many different ways. Okay, ... (pause) I think about Vickie. Vickie's retired what, two or three years now.

... Vickie was a very, very devoted teacher ... she just ... lived and breathed teaching. ... She was a real questioner and I was, "Oh, Vickie, do I have to explain this?" (laugh) And I would get kind of exasperated with that, but, (pause) then sometimes she would ask questions I really needed to hear and to think about. She made me think.

And ... sometimes it was just damn annoying. But there were just some things that she would come up with and she'd just say, you know, "Well, what about this?" or "Have you ever thought about doing this?" or bring something back from, you know, twenty years ago, "we did this and ... this worked." And very often, once we took it, as a staff, and looked at it, sometimes that was a better way to do it. One time ... it was ... designing report cards and ... she came up with the idea that (pause) we should all meet with the ... group of teachers that were coming from the past grade, the current grade and the grade they're going in to. ... If it was grade three, we talk about grade three but we would have the grade two and four teachers there, too. ... And, it was (pause) an excellent shared practice activity in the end. We didn't even make huge changes to the report card, but we did (pause) ... feel comfortable with what we had in the end. And I think a lot of good ideas came out of that for ... what teachers' expectations were from the previous grade and what the next grade wanted to see from those kids. (Interview, October 11, pp. 32-34)

I believed Penny became a better reflective practitioner through Vicki's questioning of her practice. Through Vicki's actions, I felt Penny was encouraged to think about her practice and seek out alternatives. I knew Penny valued Vicki's report card suggestion as it allowed staff members to share their practices with each other and to feel part of the collaborative process.

Penny went on to tell me about other ways her practice was influenced by Vicki:

I think there were other times, like doing some of the science activities ... so there wouldn't be so much overlap. [We tried] to have it set up so that we all knew what the grades were doing. So I can remember ... setting up ... (pause) bins [for each unit] ... and we know that it is centrally located here and we can just come and, and take the bin.

> *So yeah I think ... she's definitely influenced my practice and made me realized that even when it's annoying you have to listen. You have to listen. (Interview, October 11, p. 34)*

From listening to Penny talk, I believed Vicki greatly influenced Penny's practices by encouraging Penny to reflect and reexamine some of her best teaching practices. Interestingly enough, I think Vicki's influence continued to shape Penny's practices with other teachers. Penny told me:

> *... the complaining teachers, (pause), and I'd probably mention Laurie, she would complain and I wouldn't want to hear complaints. But ... there would always be a grain. Sometimes I thought she was too ... emphatic sometimes, you know, too intense. And I'd think she was getting too worried, or too hyper or too excited about this ... but there'd be that grain, that grain of truth there that would make me realize, yeah, I can't dismiss this. I want to dismiss the intensity of it but ... [it's] the grain of truth we have to look at. And .... she still does that to this day. You know, she'll come to me with something, and ... I always listen to her and I'll think, "Okay, what can we take out of that." Because there will be something in what she says because ... she loves kids and ... she believes passionately in ... what she's doing. (Interview, October 11, pp. 34-35)*

I believed Penny valued the people she worked with and, even when confronted with difficult situations, she had the ability to look for what she termed as that "grain of truth." By doing so, I also believed she realized there may be another way to look at situations. I began to understand how she appreciated the contributions of others and recognized their significance in her practice.

Penny told me she believed the same practice of looking for that "grain of truth" should also be applied to situations when students were involved. She said:

> *On the same token, I think we need to do that with kids! So when a kid comes and the kid's complaining and the kid's upset ... you know, say it's against a teacher you want to think well, (pause) you know, I'll protect the teacher or I'll back up the teacher but there's this grain. ... I .try to get at that and [ask] "What can we do to make you feel better about this? Now,*

> *you have to realize that, you know ... your actions caused the teacher ... to react this way but what can we do to make you feel better about it next time or how can we [prevent] that situation from happening again." And, you know, I had several instances with Vickie where she would be in my office with a kid who'd be going, "I, I don't like Mrs. Smith, she yells, or ... something like this and Vickie was just so wonderful, she'd so humble herself and say, "Okay. You know, if you think I'm yelling, we need a signal so you can remind me." She was so willing to work with that child and admit that she may not be right. And I've taken that to other situations, then gone to work with the next teacher and said, "Okay. You know, is there some place in this where you feel that you didn't do quite the right thing?" (Interview, October 11, p. 35)*

I believed Penny recognized the importance of validating that "grain of truth" by looking at additional and different perspectives, in this case the student's, when dealing with conflict situations. As well, Penny also let the teacher solve the conflict rather than positioning herself as a solution-giver by creating a place for the conversation to happen.

Penny shared a story with me to help me understand how she personally looked at a different perspective when dealing with a very difficult student incident last year. She told me:

> *Last year, I was faced with a situation [where] one of our students accused me (pause) of ... choking him, dragging him, strapping him. (pause) And I was devastated. I was just so upset and the mother believed it and there were witnesses, you know. These other kids said they saw it and it was ... a horrible situation to be facing because it wasn't true. It was you know, outright lies and lots of things but there was this grain of truth to it. I <u>was</u> upset with that kid. I was <u>too</u> angry. I know that. And I felt bad about that. And he just took it the extra mile. Right, but there was that <u>grain</u> of truth and so I always think of that now, okay, what is the grain of truth? And what can we really, what should we really focus in on and I think Vickie ... helped me learn that a lot. (Interview, October 11, pp. 35-36)*

While listening to Penny's story, I heard her pain and could not help but admire her ability to remove herself emotionally and try to look at the situation from a different

perspective. I am not sure, if I was in a similar position, I would be able to do what Penny did.

Over the three months we were together, I would frequently hear Penny talk about learning from other staff members. As our interview continued, Penny shared the influences of several other staff members.

> *Cherie's just, (pause) I don't know .... (pause) Her willingness to try to work with parents ... (pause) and be positive with parents and see kids in a positive light. I think, that's ... influenced how I look ... at parents and kids, too. She's just really good at that.*
>
> *... She's actually had to struggle with [staff perceptions of her relationships with parents and students] (pause) because (pause) even though we're very collegial and work really good as a team on this staff, there's a certain element of (pause) jealousy. (Interview, October 11, pp. 36-37)*

I asked Penny to elaborate on what she meant by jealousy and she told me:

> *When I first started teaching, ... I ... did not like teacher awards. And ... the reason was that the first year I taught, there were two of us who were brand new teachers and my principal nominated the other (pause) teacher [for the Edwin Parr Award] and I was just devastated! I couldn't believe it! As it turned out, she was a horrible teacher and she ended up leaving the profession 'cuz she didn't understand kids. But at that point, I was so hurt by that. I really thought that I was doing a good job here, really working hard, really trying ... so for a long time, I just shied away from them.*
>
> *And then it came to a point where the parents [at Meadowview] were initiating these nominations. And, it was really difficult for me to explain to them (pause) that maybe they shouldn't. (Sigh) And so I kept bringing it up at the staff and some said, "Yes, because it celebrates our school and we know that if one teacher in our school is nominated it really speaks well of all of us and brings us all, you know, in the limelight or gives us all recognition." And ... so Cherie was ... nominated for the (pause) Teacher Excellence Awards [and some jealousy resulted]. (Interview, October 11, pp. 36-39)*

I believed Penny's initial exposure to teacher awards left a painful imprint on her regarding the injustices that sometimes occurred when participating in these experiences. I, too, have struggled with the dilemma of whether or not to recognize teachers for their efforts and achievements. On one hand, I did not want to look like I was favoring one teacher over another because I have seen the tension created through nominations. And yet, I believed it was critical to acknowledge the efforts of outstanding teachers and not to lump them into the same category as those teachers who were marginal or average. From listening to Penny talk about how she handled this process, I now felt more comfortable in approaching the topic of looking at teacher nominations from a different perspective with my staff.

Penny went on to share another staff member's nomination for Teaching in Excellence.

> *John was nominated one year, too, and, you know, in the end...it's a pick out of a hat ... and that's how we ... approached it. The nomination itself was the pat on the back.*
>
> *... To me, the process of being nominated was such a pat on the back and Cherie felt that and John felt that when they were nominate. It was those letters coming in from the parents and things they were saying. You know, "You're doing a great job, we just love what you doing." That was (pause) ... good enough right there. (Interview, October 11, p. 41)*

I believed Penny recognized the importance of staff members receiving recognition for the job they were doing. She validated this through the many notes she wrote to her staff. As I mentioned in an earlier section, her staff loved to receive them and several of them have placed their notes in a personal memorabilia file (Interview, Laurie: November 28, pp. 2-3; Joanne: October 20, p. 50).

I asked Penny if her beliefs regarding the nomination of staff members for recognition and awards changed over the years as a principal. She told me:

> *I think it has changed. It's actually done an (chuckle) about-face because...at first, I disagreed with them. I didn't think you wanted to pit teachers against each other and that it would hurt teachers' feelings...but I think if you create a kind of climate within your school where you are working as a team and you are recognizing other peoples' strengths, you don't see that as a threat to yourself. You see that as an extension of yourself when someone else on staff gets nominated. ... And it became such a positive thing. Not just for that teacher. It became a positive thing for the school and a reflection of the school. ... We talked about that [at a staff meeting] and other people felt that way, too. This is not just this teacher and when the teacher talks about why they're a good teacher, they're saying "I'm a good teacher because I am so well supported by my colleagues and my staff and my community. That really helps me be a good teacher."*
>
> *And ... it's just a positive light shed on the whole school and the whole school community. And, most teachers see it that way now. ... The parents pursued this for three years in a row and they were nominating different teachers. And all three of those teachers had a very, very positive experience and it shed out on everyone. Maybe if you talked to individual teachers ... they might not admit to feeling that way but that's certainly the sense I get from them. And it was the consensus ... when we've talked about it at staff meetings. I know I've talked to other staffs who say, "No, we've just decided, we're not going to go there." And we're not that competitive with each other with the exception of probably one teacher. I think the rest see it as, "Wow! Look at what she's doing that's great and, you know, (pause) I want to share what I did that was great." (Interview, November 8, pp. 22-24)*

I admired the transition Penny made regarding her belief in teaching awards as well as how she had tried to turn this into a winning situation for everyone in the school through staff involvement and consensus. When I asked her if she would take the same approach with another staff, she told me

> *I think I would ask the staff. I would go to the staff and try to get a sense from them first before I pursue it. I think if a staff was dead set against it and I went ahead with it, I think that would be ... the wrong thing to do. ... I'd want their support before. (Interview, November 6, p. 25)*

I thought Penny believed her relationships with staff members were of a greater priority than the importance of formal recognition awards. I wondered how Penny's beliefs about staff recognition influenced her practices with student recognition. Penny told me:

> *I think it's the other way around. I think that ... I really recognized that I had to acknowledge students and recognize their good work and recognize what was positive and use their name and talk to them in the classroom and bring out what they've done well and constantly...And, you know, you'd just see the little smile and you'd think, "Okay, that has made them want to work harder or try harder the next time." And the more I did that, the more I saw it happen in the classroom. And, ... I see the school as ... the same way. The teachers are [my] classroom because the same thing works.*
>
> *I think of it [the school] as a ... (pause) classroom, trying to make the people in the classroom feel good about their work and feel good about what they're doing well that's really what I try to do. (Interview, November 8, pp. 26-28)*

I loved Penny's analogy of the school and staff being her classroom. When I had time to reflect on her words, I realized the practices I used in the classroom were also ones I, as a principal, used with the staff. I tried to practice positive recognition and active participation while demonstrating enthusiasm and motivation.

During my time at Meadowview, one of the many relationships I admired, was the relationship Penny had with her assistant principal, Elaine. Penny had told me how Elaine was her "calm in the storm" and emphasized how Elaine was "such a good person to be around" (Interview, October 11, p.12). I asked Penny if she would share with me what she'd learned from Elaine that influenced her practice. Without any hesitation, Penny enthusiastically began to talk:

> *I tend to be a very emotional person. I think I can get very, very excited and very happy and very up, up, up. And you know ... that's usually okay*

but I also can be damned mad. And things can really upset me or I can be incredibly sad. When I'm hurt, I'm hurt down to my toes. And I'm just devastated and I ... don't even want to take another step and when somebody is like that, (laugh) they're hard people to live with, I'm sure.

... But I guess, I knew I needed someone who (pause) could take that and deal with it, not to be upset by it, to be understanding about it I don't remember Elaine's and my relationship before [hiring her as assistant principal.] ... It certainly couldn't have been as close as it is now because we didn't work that closely together. But at the time, I just ... remember thinking, "She is so well organized and she'll be able to pick up those things and do those things for me, the organizational. I thought I was organized and I like to do those things but ... I knew I couldn't ... do those things and everything else. So she did the organizational things and she would always be "the ear" when I needed to talk. The other candidate ... was ... young ... but he was more concerned about him[self] and his career. That's not Elaine's concern. Elaine's concern is stability and making sure things are run well and ... she really cares about me, you know, really cares about me. And I think that really helps because I can go in there and say, "You know, Elaine. I'm upset about this and it just hurts me so much." And I can just blabber on and on and she can feel for me, but she's not going to take that home and lose sleep over it. That's ... the kind of person she is. She can also just say, "Well, you know, let's look at it this way." And she will just give me the other side of the coin. Most often she agrees with my ideas and when I ... say, "What about this?" 'Cuz she's not the idea perpetuator ... that's not her role. (Interview, November 8, pp. 10-12)

Penny talked about many of the attributes Elaine brought to their relationship. I believed Penny valued Elaine's stability and organization. I thought Penny felt a balance between the two of them – that their combined skills allowed them to be a formidable team.

As Penny continued to talk, her voice took on a reflective and intense tone. She told me:

... (pause) (sigh) The respect that I have for her comes from her ... demeanor, but not just that, it's her excitement and thrill. Like she just ... loves kids, like some kid does some special thing and ... she just gets joy from it so I could see that was still in her even though she wasn't this up and down, excitable person that I was. But she still had this love ... and joy and she does to this day. I mean, she's been put back in a situation where she's teaching more than she has since she became vice-principal and she's got the homeroom responsibility that, [she] used to share. And

> *she's loving it. I mean, it's more work for her and yet she just has a real love for these kids and she's just really enjoying that class and ... when she tells me something that a kid said or ... she just has that beam on her face. But then, (pause) when something else needs to be taken care of, (pause) I can just say, "Elaine, can you take care of this?" and I know it's going to be done and it's going to be done well and I don't have to worry about it. I guess, we've got into such a pattern now that she just jumps in there and does it. She doesn't need to be asked a lot of the time. This is kind of awkward for us. [Gestures to layout of new office.] We don't talk as much as we usually do and it's because our offices are so far away and because she's teaching a lot. (Interview, November 8, pp. 10-13)*

I thought Penny marveled at Elaine's continued enthusiasm for teaching and working with children. I believed Penny respected Elaine and had great confidence in her. I got a sense that they were almost like Yin and Yang – two parts of a whole.

I asked Penny if she could elaborate on their relationship and the strong bond they shared. She said:

> *I can risk sharing (all) sorts of things with her...and (know) it's okay. She'll still care about me. She's not going to make judgements about me....That's the trust plus it won't go far, (pause) because she's such a lady of integrity and that's something I value very, very much. And, I never see selfishness from her. It's just never there. (laugh) She's not a mean person. She doesn't need a lot of accolades... (pause) [and yet] she recognizes what others do well. I think she feels very content...in her situation. We talk about our own children, too, a lot. But...when I talk about my kids, [she tells me] "Oh yes, we went through that, too." And ... "in the end, it's going to be okay." (Interview, November 8, pp. 15-17)*

I believed Elaine's unconditional caring allowed Penny to share personal and professional stories with her. I also believed Penny valued Elaine's integrity and non-judgmental manner, which allowed them to work together as a strong team.

I asked Penny if she would share a story about Elaine that influenced her as a principal. She told me:

> *I'm thinking of that situation last year where, (pause) little Walter accused me ... of doing those horrible things to him. And, you know, I remember feeling a real guilt (pause) and I thought, "Okay, well, Elaine's the person I can talk to and ... I'll just be really open and honest with her and just tell her ... exactly what happened and how I feel and ...(pause)." But I did ... push this boy back into a chair and I didn't feel right about that ... but I had left the room and gone to talk to her about it before I went back to talk to him about it again and ... (pause) ... she gave me that feeling that, "No, it ... was okay, Penny. That was ... in loco parentis ... way of acting in that situation." I tend to blame myself first, if something's wrong, it must be my fault. So, (pause) ... I was quite willing to say this is my fault and yet she said, "No, no, you know what ... was behind what you were thinking and, you know the actions you took were appropriate for the situation. Yes, you were angry but you had those reasons for that, and you had a history with the kid." And, she reminded me of all the other things that had happened before this incident, you know, where I was just focusing, just on that incident and she reminded me of the history and ... you know, the other run-ins that we had had with him. And I think she really got me through that because I was ... quite devastated. I mean, it ended up being...brought before the superintendent and ... the superintendent came out to investigate and [the mother] was ready to go ... to the Minister. ... I was pretty upset and pretty worried about it but then I think (Elaine) gave me the strength ... to stand up for myself and say, "You know, I did the best I could in this situation and this is a child that's ... manipulating." Yes, I felt sorry for him. This little boy has lost his daddy, you know. But, I wasn't going to let that affect the outcome of what was going to happen there. And, then ... of course it's like any story that starts, it gets embellished and ... when he described some of the things that supposedly happened, well, then Elaine could verify she was in the hall talking to me when he said I grabbed him so she knew that didn't happen. (Interview, November 8, pp. 13-15)*

I thought Penny's story demonstrated the calming influence Elaine had on her. I believed Penny respected and valued Elaine's opinion, and Elaine was the person Penny trusted most in this situation to give her an objective point of view.

Penny summed up her feelings about the staff at Meadowview.

> *There's a lot of ... gifted people and it's really neat to see them [working together.] I mean just something as simple as setting up those damn chairs. Do you think that anyone wants to set up 90 chairs for something that isn't even for us!?! No one wants to do that but they do. They all dig*

> *in and it's done. That's <u>just</u> the atmosphere here. (Interview, October 11, p. 32)*

I believed Penny valued the staff with whom she worked. Even when her ideas were questioned, she appreciated an opportunity to look at situations from different perspectives. I found her relationships with her staff were based on mutual trust and respect.

I asked Penny what her future plans were. She told me:

> *(pause) I don't want to say this too loudly, but I'm ready for a change. I really am. I made a commitment to the staff that I would stay as long as ... the renovations were going on. (laugh) Little did I know that that was going to be a ten-year commitment. (Interview, October 11, pp. 12-14)*

Penny told me she had applied for a central office position several years ago. Upon reflection, she told me she is appreciative she wasn't successful. She said:

> *It was an ugly situation and I thought, "Oh, thank God!" I didn't need that. Plus I wasn't sure I was ready to be away from kids. That kind of scared me because that's the joy! Walk out in that hall. Lots of times there's no other joy. (laugh)*
>
> *... They look up in your face and want to tell you something or give you those hugs. And if I'm having a bad day, boy, all I have to do is go down to grades one and twos' and they just cheer me up. It's even better when you don't have to teach them.*
>
> *... I'm glad I stayed. I'm glad that I'm still a principal and (pause) that I still have the contact with the kids. And ... seeing this [gestures to renovations] to completion, will be very rewarding but I think I need another challenge. (Interview, October 11, pp. 16-17)*

From listening to Penny's stories, I believed her primary influence from teachers has been to listen, reflect and consider all the possibilities before a decision is reached. I thought her ability to do this has enabled her to establish strong, valued and mutually respected relationships within her school community.

CHAPTER FIVE - CHERIE'S STORY

INFLUENCES FROM CHILDHOOD

We do not know where we are going,
but we are on our way.
Stephen Vincent Benét (cited in Pagels. 2000, p.37)

I met Cherie[1] and the two other teachers who volunteered to participate in my research study for the first time at the beginning of June. The purpose of our meeting was to discuss my project, their participation and the types of field texts I would be collecting. From talking with Cherie, I found out she was an experienced teacher who had taught at Meadowview School for fifteen years. During that time she has had a variety of assignments, primarily at the division one level.

My initial impression of Cherie was that she was a thoughtful and sensitive individual who was open to new experiences. Even with impending progress reports and summer holidays looming in the not too distant future, she asked if there was anything the group could do to help me in preparation for my research such as writing their own stories before the project formally started in August. Cherie's offer to assist me with my project confirmed my initial perceptions of her. And these perceptions of thoughtfulness, sensitivity and openness to new experiences would continue to be evident, day after day throughout my three-month field study. I witnessed an example of this one day in early October when some of the students from Meadowview School were participating in the district cross country races.

1. Names of people and some places used in stories are pseudonyms.

Meadowview School was located in a rural area of the province and most of the students were bussed to and from school. In order to facilitate student participation, the races were scheduled during the school day. I noted in my journal:

> *Cherie's class was minus thirteen students today due to the district cross country races and there were substitutes in for a couple of staff members so the day was very hectic. Cherie had parent volunteers in the class as well. She just smiled, shrugged her shoulders and carried on with the students who were still there. I felt that she was ready for anything that may come her way, a sort of "que sera, sera" mindset that says "I'll do the best I can with the circumstances the way they are." (Journal notes, October 2)*

I believed Cherie's openness to new experiences helped her to deal with the inevitable changes that occur on a school landscape. It was only when we sat down together and talked one October day after school in the principal's office that I had a chance to better understand how Cherie had developed such an open attitude towards change.

Shifting Back to Childhood

Cherie and I held our first interview in Penny's office one Thursday after school in October. By this time, we had chatted a lot about the students in her class and some of her summer holiday experiences but I still knew little about Cherie's life history. As Cherie talked about her childhood, I was intrigued as I listened to the many changes that occurred for her in her first eighteen years of life. I began to sense her willingness to embrace new situations may be directly related to the many moves she and her family experienced while she was a child. She told me:

> *I moved around a lot when I was a kid. I started out in Devon ... and we were there until I was probably about 5. ... Then we moved to Edmonton ... and ... my dad passed away when I was about 8 or 9. ... My*

2. Some transcripts have been edited for readability. Most repetitions, laughter and pauses were removed.

> *mom remarried so we went way up to High Level ... A couple of years later, we went back to Edmonton ... until I was in grade 9. Then ... Dad decided to get out of forestry and go into farming so we went to Viking ... I spent grade 12 there and ... then I went on to Camrose to the college and Mom and Dad proceeded to move about 10 more times. (Interview, October 11, pp. 1-2)*

As a child, I spent my first eighteen years living in the same city, on the same street in the same house. It was only when I went to university in another city that I had to deal with the ramifications of moving to a new place. I was amazed to hear Cherie talk about the moves and the changes in her childhood life with such ease. When I asked her how she believed moving so many times as a child influenced who she was today, she shared the following thoughts:

> *Well, I think ... that it makes you ... more open to people because ... you have to move into different situations, like even moving ... from grade nine to grade ten into a new school. That was probably the hardest move, ... but I think ... it definitely improves your people skills. ... My husband, on the other hand, he grew up in the same place ... and I can see when he goes back home, home is home ... like that's the home you've been in forever ... but I don't have that ... and at times, that bothered me. But ... on the other hand, it probably helped me cope with changes ... because there [were] a lot of changes. ... I think it probably helped me, too ... especially in grade ten with girls, who ... label you and ... do things and ... you just learn to be yourself and not worry about that and time proves, always proves, who you are. (Interview, November 8, pp. 12-13)*

From listening to Cherie's stories and from watching her in the classroom, I believe she was comfortable with who she was, with her personal and professional identity.

Shifting Forward to Meadowview

On many occasions throughout my three months at Meadowview, I witnessed Cherie demonstrating her personal values and beliefs as they were reflected in her words and actions to others. In my journal, I wrote about my observations:

> *Cherie has an incredibly soft voice that has a really warm, caring and nurturing tone to it that always encourages students. One thing that struck me this morning was the way that she always looks for the positive to redirect and remind students, such as Mary, how hard the student worked last week on "raising her hand" and "not calling out" and how Cherie is hoping that Mary will continue to work on that this week. She words things in the positive form and ... seems to have a real sense, already within less than two weeks of what these kids can and can't do and how they need to be refocused and redirected. (Journal notes, September 10)*

The impact of her thoughtfulness and sensitivity was never clearer than her actions the following day. In early September, the world as we knew it changed. The bombing of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon affected young and old. I found myself "mind-boggled," confused and anxious (Journal notes, September 11). When I arrived at school, the atmosphere was very somber. Staff and students expressed their anxieties as well as wondering what was going to happen next. When the bell rang, we all headed to class still waiting for some answers. I started my morning in Cherie's class and noted in my journal:

> *The students in Cherie's class asked questions about the possibility of war and their fathers, uncles and brothers going off to fight for Canada. I sensed a great feeling of anxiety and fear from her students. Aware of that, I believe that Cherie was particularly sensitive when responding to students this morning. She spoke in a gentle voice, using a lot of close proximity and positive, reassuring language. At one point, she said that she needed a student to do a special task for her and most of the students eagerly volunteered. Cherie selected a student only after she had told the class that "I'd like to pick everyone but I can only pick one." (Journal notes, September 11)*

Although Cherie's voice always had a caring and concerned tone to it, on that day, I felt she was making an extreme effort to provide additional support to her students. She worked very hard to answer student questions, some of them more than once, always giving respectful answers and making students feel their questions were valid ones. Cherie's demonstrated reassurance to students of their continued worth and value to her was a poignant memory for me, one that I will always associate with the events of September 11th, 2001.

While listening to Cherie's stories of her childhood, I asked her if moving so many times influenced the way she accommodated new students in her classroom. She responded to my question this way:

> *When you are new ... you sit beside the ... fat kid ... and ... like I had this one girl who was really close to me ... and she had no friends ... but I mean, I was in the same boat ... so I sat beside her and we became really good friends and so ... I think that ... maybe that's helped me, too, to identify with kids that aren't fitting in to the group or whatever ... because I've been there and I also know each person is unique and should be valued. (Interview, November 8, p. 14)*

Cherie's way of handling new students in new situations extended to me as well. Through our conversations at school, Cherie knew that I was very anxious about my impending candidacy exam. On my last morning before my exam, she presented me with a "survival kit" made up of thoughtful and humourous items to see me through my ordeal (Journal notes, September 19). A "star" because I was one, an "eraser" because it was okay to make mistakes, and a "smelly sticker" in case I forgot my deodorant were just a

few of the items in my treasure bag. Her survival kit now hangs in my office as a memento of her thoughtfulness and kindness.

Moving Back to Childhood

As a child in school, sports played an integral part in my life. It was a time when I could be part of a "fraternity" of athletes, part of a whole, something that gave me a sense of belonging. Knowing this about myself and knowing Cherie had played a lot of sports, I was curious to know if sports had played an important part in her childhood. When I asked her if sports influenced her in any way, she shared the following:

> *It's not like I was an outsider all the time, either. ... I played sports, too, and that was a big influence and ... you really get to know people and stuff.*
>
> *Yeah... oh, for sure ... [during] our high school years we had an excellent coach and we were busy. (Interview, November 8, p. 15)*

From listening to Cherie's stories, I realized she and I had both been busy with extra-curricular activities during our school years. It was only through our many conversations throughout the research period I found we had many other similar connections. One of these connections, interestingly enough, was that Cherie, just like me, did not consciously plan to be a teacher during her childhood years. She shared with me the rather ingenious way she decided to pursue this career path on her life's journey.

> *Well, I've always liked working with kids...when I was in Viking ... I was a playground leader, like for my summer job.*
>
> *Actually, there was a teacher, you know ... in grade 12 you write down your career and your likes and dislikes?... I had put [down] something, I don't even remember what it was, but he changed it to an elementary school teacher ... so I always think that made me, maybe made me think ... you know that ... I could do that. (Interview, October 11, p. 4)*

Cherie's openness to new experiences led her to a career in teaching. During our time together, Cherie shared many of her experiences both on and off of the school landscape. She told me she believed a key ingredient to her successful teaching career was that she frequently relied on her intuitions to guide her in new situations. She said:

> *I usually go with my intuitions and I find I go through resources and I get things and I feel comfortable just being out there on my own. (Interview, November 8, p. 19)*

Reflecting on my notes and our many conversations together, I realized Cherie treated each day as a new adventure. I believed her thoughtfulness, sensitivity and openness to new experiences as a result of her early childhood experiences as well as her strong sense of self were major influences in her professional practices.

INFLUENCES FROM THE BEGINNING TEACHING YEARS

> *What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything.*
> *Vincent Van Gogh (cited in Reader's Digest, 1998, p. 107)*

For our second interview, Cherie and I sat around the round table in the old assistant principal's office at the end of the day once the "dust had settled" and the students had departed. We chose this particular room because it was located away from the main traffic areas of the school as well as for its privacy. The office was a familiar spot for me as I had spent a great deal of time testing students in there over the previous six weeks.

In our first interview, Cherie had told me about her childhood and the various moves her family made. She went on to tell me when she graduated from university with an

education degree she was unable to find a full-time teaching position so she chose to work in a daycare and substitute teach in the surrounding rural areas. One of her substitute assignments, during that time, was to cover for a maternity leave at Meadowview School. When the teacher on leave returned, she wrote the district superintendent to express how happy she was with the work Cherie had done and Cherie was hired on with the school board. Since that time, she's been teaching at Meadowview School. Over these past fifteen years, Cherie has had three different principals who "each had something to offer" (Interview, October 11, p. 14).

Sliding Back in Time to Beginning Meadowview Days

During our interview, Cherie recounted how her first principal influenced her even before she was hired. Prior to her interview, he told her to "just be yourself" (Interview, October 11, p. 14). From listening to Cherie's stories of her many childhood moves, I believed she had already discovered the importance of being herself and having the principal reaffirm her belief was important for her.

Cherie shared with me she was initially hired to teach grade one. After she started at Meadowview, she told me she became aware her principal was a recovering alcoholic and there were some pre-existing problems on staff as a result of this. She said:

> *Because you're a first year teacher, you really look to [your principal but] because he was ... an alcoholic before ... he had problems. The staff ... were very strong because we didn't have the support there. (Interview, October 11, p. 14)*

I asked Cherie if her principal encouraged and honoured his comment "to be yourself." She told me:

> *For sure ... and you know, he probably felt comfortable because I would go to him 'cuz I was a first year teacher where the older teachers didn't have any patience for him anymore so they didn't need to kowtow to anything that he said much ... they just kind of ... went along, that kind of thing. But ... there were some things ... he did for me but I think ... like I said, 'cuz in your first year, you're pretty glassy-eyed. (Interview, October 11, p. 15)*

Although Cherie said she did not have a lot of interaction with her first principal, she told me she thought he supported her as a classroom teacher primarily through the various comments he made (Interview, October 11, p. 15).

During our first interview, Cherie shared with me she didn't have a lot of problems during her first year of teaching and her principal kept commenting how she should have had more (Interview, November 8, p. 17). She talked about how he would frequently pop his head into her classroom and give her feedback and encouragement. From listening to Cherie's stories, I believed this feedback helped her to develop a greater confidence in her skills as a teacher (Interview, October 11, p. 16). She told me:

> *They [the comments] were just very abrupt...he'd just pop his head in and say, "I don't know how you do it, Cherie!" (laugh) [or] ... "Just keep doing what you're doing" kind of thing and then off he went ... it ... was just kind of little snippets like that. (Interview, October 11, p. 16)*

Moving Forward in Time to Today

From listening to her stories, I believed Cherie valued the comments her principal made and I saw many similar examples in her classroom. In my field notes, I remarked about how Cherie frequently provided her students with reinforcing comments such as "good job," "that's your best printing," and "nice to see everyone is writing" and how the

students thrived on her one-on-one attention (Field notes, September 11, September 12, October 16).

Moving Back to her Experience with her First Principal

Cherie spoke about the little things her first principal did which showed her he supported her. She told me about one occasion when she needed a rug for her classroom, he purchased one for her by the next day (Interview, October 11, p. 16).

Cherie shared with me that her first principal did not initiate or have a lot of involvement within the school. So when he informed her he was nominating her for the Edwin Parr Award for first year teachers, she was very surprised. She said:

> *And then for him to do that nomination for that first year teaching thing was kind of a rare thing, too, right, because ... he didn't really (pause) ... you know, within the school have a lot of involvement in things or initiate things like that so then, for him to do that was, (pause) was a surprise. (Interview, October 11, p. 17)*

I asked Cherie to tell me about the nomination process for this award. She shared the following story with me:

> *[The principal] came and said that he felt ... he wanted to nominate me. ... So we had to sit down and fill out an application form. ... It listed why [the teacher should be considered] and what [the teacher does worthy of mention.] So the three of us sat down, the vice-principal and the principal and me and we were filling out this form. ... It was so funny 'cuz [the principal] knew ... what we had to say, you know ... that I ... reached all levels of ... kids and ... I reached the visual and the auditory and the ... hands-on kids. ... He would just say, "Okay, this is what's got to go in it." And he'd say this and he would get the vice-principal started on it. (laugh) (Interview, November 8, p. 18)*

In her second year of teaching, things were not going well overall at Meadowview School. Cherie told me:

> *A lot of staff were very disgruntled with him and it was pretty messy when ... they sent ... another vp in here to ... see what was going on. And then, you know, he more or less retired after that. (Interview, October 11, p. 15)*

Cherie, the ever-positive person, concluded her remarks about her first principal by saying:

> *You know, it's like anybody may have problems, [but] there's still that other side to them and ... that you can see. (Interview, October 11, p. 15)*

From listening to these stories, I understood Cherie felt supported by her first principal through the drop-in comments he made to her and by his nomination of her for the Edwin Parr Award.

Introducing Keith, Principal Two

As Cherie began talking about Keith, her second principal, I realized the staff had been feeling rather detached from the administration at this point in time. She told me:

> *Then, of course, then comes the new administrator who's going to change us all (laugh) 'cuz we have just been doing, you know, we've hanging from the lights here. We've had no direction, we have had nothing and so ... there was a rough and rocky road, I guess. And ... we used to joke about how he would have a "flavour of the month," 'cuz every staff meeting he would be into something new. And he treated staff members, (pause) he belittled them, I guess, you know, he didn't give you the kind of confidence that you have to have. I mean ... his agenda was to, you know, to educate, or I guess ... improve our professional development, but he did it in a way that was intimidating and made you feel (pause) that you were inadequate. (Interview, October 11, p. 18)*

As Cherie told me this story, I was thrown back to a place in time where I, too, experienced an administrator who was very intimidating. The knots started to form in my

stomach as I recalled how we, as a staff, waited every day for the yelling to start and hoped it wasn't aimed in our direction. Our mission soon became one of staying out of the principal's sight. Fortunately, I, like Cherie, managed to avoid receiving the brunt of my principal's anger. As she continued her story, she told me:

> *But ... I didn't experience that so much as some teachers 'cuz he ... was ... really into change so when he ... saw something in somebody that he wanted to improve, he really narrowed in on... those teachers and made it miserable for them at times. (pause) (Interview, October 11, p. 18)*

I asked Cherie to tell me how Keith had influenced her practice. She explained his influence in a concise manner.

> *Well ... I think I ... would say that he, (pause) he affirmed what I believe on how <u>not</u> to treat people. And that if people don't feel good about themself and don't feel good in the things that they can do, they just shut down, you know, and they're scared, they're scared to take any chances or take any risks at all. And ... he tried to control, like he was very controlling about what was said in the staff room and, you know ... it just made for a very awkward situation and ... out of that I think ... you just learn that those people skills don't work. (Interview, October 11, p. 19)*

I asked Cherie if she could tell me a story to give me a better understanding of Keith's influence. She told me:

> *A story that would have influenced me was the time when, and ... it didn't really involve me but I was in the staff room and, there was a sub in. And, she was talking about this class that she had and it was a really rangy class and that it was a shame that the administrator didn't support her more. And immediately, one of his snitches ... got up and left the room and went straight down to the office and we all knew what was going to happen, right? And then there was a big, big blow-up where ... he phoned her and it was like, it kind of got ugly there and so ... she came back to the school ... but it was really awkward but that's the kind of environment that it was. And so, it made it kind of awkward. (pause) (Interview, October 11, p. 20)*

Shifting Along the Temporal Dimension to Today

From listening to her story of Keith's influence, I understood why Cherie demonstrated how she valued people and their opinions. In the classroom and throughout the school, I saw Cherie working with a variety of people in various situations which demonstrated her regard for their input. I noted in my journal:

> *Cherie has this incredible smile with the kids and is so encouraging and her voice tone is so insightful. She treats kids with such respect. She talks about what she should see and what she should hear and acknowledges kids who are doing a great job. (Journal notes, September 25)*

From my observations in Cherie's classroom and around the school, I saw how people, staff, students and parents would light up when she talked with them. She always had a positive word to say to them which, I believed, showed how much she valued their contributions.

Sliding Back to Her Work with Keith

I asked Cherie if she would share a story of working through a difficult situation with the administration. She shared the following:

> *Well, I have ... one story that I remember happening to me. ... I had a child that was ... in kindergarten, actually. And ... he was hitting with the library sticks, in the library ... we have those little sticks. And ... he had a lot of problems. ... We had come back to the room and mom was there and mom had been drinking. And all these little kindergarten kids kind of said, "Oh, your son missed library." you know, kind of thing. And she took offense to it and she started yelling at me in front of the kids. And so, I did the back thing where I backed out into ... a little room there and I tried to talk to her in there. And, she wouldn't listen to me. So, she stormed down to the office and so I dismissed the kids (pause) and went down into the office. And, now, I wouldn't have done that.*
>
> *... You know, I regret doing that because she had been drinking so she was just totally irrational. And, she, more or less ... just was telling ... the principal that I was ... very inadequate and I wasn't doing my job and I*

was picking on her boy and all this stuff. And ... I tried to defend myself which I shouldn't have done 'cuz she wasn't rational, right? So, it ended up that she, (pause) she stormed out of the office and, of course, I was in tears and Penny came in. Penny was the v.p. then and she hugged me. And, my administrator had to leave. He had a meeting or something, so he said, "Can you take care of her?"

So, I'm not sure if he phoned her afterwards or at that time. ... I think what happened is he let her roll off her steam and then he called and said that, "We need to meet and talk about this ... again, 'cuz we have a problem here." And, so the next day ... he said to me ... "The only thing you can do from this is learn what to do next time. What ... would have been the right thing to do next time." He said, "You know, like, (pause) not letting her yell at you in the hallway but trying to get her into the room." Which I had done.

But, you know, I thought about it afterwards ... that I should have just let her go in there and say, but right away you want to go in there and stick up for yourself and not let her say anything 'cuz you were right, you know ... and I had thought (that) at the time. But it would have been better if I would have just stayed out 'cuz I just infuriated her more and, you know, she had a chip on her shoulder and it just set her off that her kid had been singled out in front of ... all those kids ... So, then she came back in and we listened to her and made her feel important and then she was okay. (laugh)

...There were lots of issues there and, you know ... you do have to listen to them. ... She is doing the best that she can but, you know ... the administration did tell her it was inappropriate for her to come in and, and talk like that. 'Cuz I even had parents phone me and say, "What happened?" You know, 'cuz their child came home and said that ... this mom was yelling at Mrs. Holt in the hallway and here's these little kindergarteners, they're just..." (laugh)

So anyway, I had lots of support there though, you know. Penny gave me kleenex and (sniff, sniff and laugh) said, "It's okay, Cherie."

You know, and so ... I'm sure that's how it went. ... He just kind of drew ... the meeting to a close and he just said ... at that time, "We need to talk at a different time." (Interview, November 8, pp. 43-47)

While listening to Cherie's story, I recognized she felt she had done the best that she could have under these circumstances. She and I talked about dealing with parents who were under the influence of alcohol and how difficult it was to find a win-win solution.

I noted earlier Cherie had such an upbeat personality and believed everyone had strengths. This was true in the case of Keith as well. She said:

> *... at the same time, he did a lot for this school and there's a lot of things that we still do because of him. ... There [were[a lot of people [who] were very stressed and were close to nervous breakdowns almost. And yet, here he was doing things for us that, for our school ... stayed with us. (Interview October 11, pp. 18-19)*

Cherie talked about how Keith influenced her own practice as well:

> *... through the inservices and stuff, you did learn and you did grow and like, you know, he was the one who implemented handing in ... the unit plans and handing in the rainy plans and doing all that kind of stuff, so ... on that other flip side, he taught me how to be more organized and prepared ... for class. (Interview, October 11, p. 19)*

During the time Cherie worked with Keith, another situation arose with a parent where the superintendent of schools became involved. In this story, the superintendent validated Cherie's professional conduct for her. Cherie told me:

> *I was teaching ... halftime with another teacher and this little boy had gone outside, supposedly without his boot on and his mother came storming in, swearing at us and cussing at us. And you know, we were just kind of taken aback and ... we didn't respond to her right away so she [swore] all the way down the hall to the principal's office. And ... we were pretty fresh then, you know, I was pretty young. ... So we never called her or anything. And, she went to the district office. The next day she called the superintendent and the story had gotten worse. It was like ... this kid had asked us to put on the boot and we hadn't put on the boot and made him go outside without ... and it just got worse and worse kind of thing. So, they decided to set up a meeting ... with the superintendent ... and the principal and us two teachers and these parents. And, (pause) ... like there was kind of an icky situation there because I don't know that ... the administrator had actually attempted to phone them you know, before, in between this time but he said he had.*
>
> *And so there was kind of a gray area there where, you know, I wasn't really comfortable with but ... he had handled that so I just left that to*

him. So anyway, we sit down with these people and, ... (pause) you know, we weren't really prepped at all. I wasn't sure ... I just relied on, "Okay, I'm just going to tell the truth here," kind of thing.

And, so we sat down ... and started talking about the situation that had happened and ... they said their side of the story and we said our side of the story ... and ... I don't know, half way through it, you know, I just thought ... it's like ... [you] always really (pause) listen to their side of the story and let them say what they need to say but it wasn't the truth, you know. And I ... thought that was wrong. I thought, "Well we need to say this." but you always have to do that so delicately, you know, so I just said, "You know, I really have to say that that was <u>not</u> my perception ... and it was not what had ... had happened, that when you came into the room, we laughed at you." ... I said, "We were just kind of ... surprised that someone came into the room and started yelling and screaming ... and ... it wasn't meant to be that way. I would never send a child out to do that kind of thing." And, at that point, the mom started to cry and Dad, you know ... it was kind of like the other mom, they kind of want airtime, right?

They wanted you to know their life and ... the hardships that they have and stuff like that and we gave them that. And so ... I kind of think at that point, maybe ... Mom realized that maybe this had gotten blown way out of proportion and then, after the meeting, after the parents left, we're standing in this office with the superintendent and everything and, you know, just a big sigh. And ... the superintendent said, "That was a class act, ladies." Like he said, "You know, you guys handled yourselves extremely well in there," and ... more or less said, "Good job what you did." You know, and we didn't even know what we were supposed to do. (laugh) (Interview, November 8, pp. 47-49)

While I listened to Cherie tell her story, I was struck by her courage to put forth her perceptions of the incident. In my experience, in situations like the one Cherie described, I found the teacher often deferred to the administration. And in some cases, this deference was to the teacher's disadvantage. I admired Cherie for going out on a limb and sharing her perceptions of the incident.

Cherie worked with Keith for about five years, until he decided to teach overseas. Cherie shared some of her conflicted feelings about her time with him. She said:

> *When he went to leave, the last day, he came and gave me a big hug and I was upset that he was leaving. (laugh) Even though I knew that he did all these things but, you know ... he was supportive to me and I never went through the things that some of the other teachers went through. ... I could see the good that he did in our school. And, you know, those people, sometimes, they really do mean to do good ... in their own way, but, (pause) but it was pretty damaging, and it took some people a long time to ... get over all that. (pause) And so, then, (pause) he left. He went to Kenya or he went over to Africa. ... He took a job over there where ... (pause) he ... teaches the people how to run schools, kind of things. I don't know what the name for it is, like he's just like an advisor or whatever. Like they could hire those people to go over there and (pause) in comes Penny (laugh). (Interview, October 11, pp. 20-21)*

From listening to her stories about her beginning teaching practice, I believed Cherie learned to trust her personal practical knowledge. She shared with me that all of her principals used the overlying theme of "just to be yourself." She went on to say: "I've been told that so often in my life, I guess, that's something that, you know, has just come through every time" (Interview, October 11, p. 14). I found Cherie also sought to find something positive in her interactions with others. I thought the affirmation Cherie received from her first principal and the superintendent were meaningful as it validated her professional practices for her.

OTHER CAREER INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED CHERIE'S PRACTICE

What comes from the heart,
Goes to the heart.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (cited in Pinkney & Whiter, 1999, p. 152)

One of my fondest memories of Meadowview School was the laughter I heard in the school on a daily basis. I was thrilled to be part of this teaching community and found myself grinning from ear to ear as I drove to and from the school each day. The laughter was never more apparent than when I was with Cherie. She and I often chuckled and giggled throughout our interviews and I found myself sharing more and more of my life story with her in our conversations. Her teaching story in many ways paralleled my own and I eagerly awaited the time when I would hear her latest stories.

Shifting Backwards in Time to Early Meadowview Days

During her third year of teaching, Cherie left on a maternity leave and Penny was hired to replace her in her grade one part-time position. After a nine-month absence, Cherie returned to Meadowview School, again under Keith's leadership. Approximately three years later, Penny became her principal. Cherie talked about the changes Penny brought about to Meadowview School and shared her story of this transition time with me.

> *When (Keith) left, she (Penny) was v.p. at the time, so she just stepped into ... (his) place. And, of course, she is ... so down to earth ... and she just turned around how everybody felt about themselves as a teacher. And ... I think ... when you're down to earth and you are yourself, then it makes other people feel more comfortable about themselves and ... then they're more inclined to ... show who they really are and to grow. (Interview, October 10, p. 21)*

From our conversation, I believed Cherie valued administrators who allowed staff members to be themselves.

Moving Forward to Meadowview Today

From listening and watching her in the school setting, I thought Cherie identified with other people who were as genuine as she was. I noted in my field notes how accepting Cherie was of her students and their life stories. Her students, in turn, were very happy to be in her classroom because, I believed, they recognized her acceptance of them and the support she gave to help them be successful in school. I witnessed many occasions when Cherie circulated around the room and provided words of encouragement to her students. In addition, she always provided them with advance warnings so they were aware of her timelines and expectations and able to complete the tasks assigned (Field notes, September 24, October 3, October 22).

Cherie, too, was very down to earth and made me feel comfortable from the beginning. She was someone I felt I could easily be myself with. We spent a great deal of time sharing personal stories and talking about the adventures of her students. Every day, we would chat about her plans for my time in the classroom. She would review the tasks she wanted me to do with the students and she always checked to ensure I felt comfortable with the jobs she assigned (Journal notes, September 12, October 12).

Moving Back to Early Meadowview

I asked Cherie to share some examples of what Penny did to change staff attitudes. She told me:

> *Well, through the notes. You know ... she's really big into writing letters and ... (chuckle) my husband always, "Gees!" .. .'cuz when you write report card(s) you get like this page on how wonderful you are. (laugh) ... and then you ... do a unit plan ... and there'll be ... a bunch of stuff on there just saying what she's noticed and ... that affirmation's good. Anyway, I can keep going on about Penny. I guess she's the one, too, that*

> *when ... Keith ... left and she needed a vp, she's the one who came to me and said, "Cherie, I really think you can do this job." So, she's the one that's encouraged me that way all along ... and that's through talking to me. (Interview, October 11, pp. 21-22)*
>
> *Penny ... [always] affirms...with notes and compliments and stuff like that. (Interview, November 8, p. 51)*

During our interviews and conversations together, Cherie always stressed the strengths and attributes of the people with whom she worked. I believed she saw Penny's notes as concrete examples of ways to promote positive staff attitudes.

Sliding Along the Temporal Dimension to Today

From my observations in Cherie's class, I agreed with Penny, that Cherie valued the importance of affirming the work of others, in Cherie's case, the work of her students. I noted in my field text notes:

> *Cherie frequently circulates around the classroom, spending one-on-one time with each student, checking for understanding, providing them positive reinforcement and recognition for the work they are doing. Phrases such as "good job", "nice to see your work", great job", and "give yourself a pat on the back" were frequently heard throughout the room. (Field Notes, September 11, September 12, September 17, October 3)*

Shifting Back in Time to Early Meadowview

In both of our interviews, Cherie shared how Penny introduced several professional growth experiences to her. I believed three of the most significant experiences were: an early reading intervention program known as Reading Recovery, the district mentorship program and the Educational Leadership Academy (ELA).

The first of these three significant professional development experiences occurred when Penny organized an inservice program for staff to learn about Reading Recovery after she completed a university course on the Marie Clay Reading Recovery program (Interview, November 8, p. 25). Cherie told me she was very interested in learning about a program that would help children to learn to read. She explained:

> *It was just so good to see that there was a program like that to reach the kids. So ... I'm not ... fully trained, like, it's very intensive what they do. So we didn't do that. But, she [Penny] just sat us down and went through her program, like her notes and the handouts and stuff on how to do it. She taught us how to do it. And then, (pause) ... the next year the opportunity came where ... she said, "Well, I want to inservice you, so, are you interested in ... teaching this to ... one child?" Like I only had one period where I was released for it and she had two. And so, I said, "Sure ... I think I can do this." And you know, she really believes that especially from teaching grade one...you get a lot of the knowledge on how to teach the kids how to read. ... So ... that was why she had chosen me to do that, 'cuz ... I had signed up to ... take it. (Interview, November 8, pp. 25-26)*

I believed, as Penny did, Cherie's experience as a Grade One teacher provided her with a foundation that would assist her when working with students who struggled with learning to read. From our conversations, Cherie shared with me how her enthusiasm for professional development has been on-going (Interview, October 11, p. 32).

Sliding Forward to Meadowview

I recognized in our time together, Cherie believed it was very important to look for ways to reach all of her students. While working in her classroom, I saw how she organized her program to accommodate her students' various ability levels. She frequently used additional assistance from parent volunteers, teaching assistants and myself to aid her in this task. When I entered her classroom each morning, plans were laid out for each of her

adult helpers in concise detail, grouping students who needed extra help in groups of four or five while she worked with a larger group (Field notes, October 3, October 16).

Moving Back in Time to Early Meadowview

I asked Cherie to talk about an administrator who encouraged her to do something professionally that has influenced her practice. She told me:

> *Well, I would say the one who's done that would be Penny with this whole administration thing. You know, like even ... when she ... went to be the principal, and encouraged me to try out for the v.p. it was like, "What?!?" (laugh) You know, I mean I hadn't even considered it and actually at that time ... I just said, "No," because my kids were younger and it wasn't something that I even would consider. But ... I felt complimented that she had asked and thought that I, you know, I could do that job. So ... then I just put it away. (Interview, November 8, p. 29)*

I believed the mentoring program Cherie talked about was the second significant professional development experience under Penny's leadership. Cherie's involvement occurred when Penny encouraged her to take part in a mentoring program the school district had set up to train potential leadership candidates. This was a program where Penny and Cherie worked together with Penny mentoring Cherie in various aspects of school leadership and administration. I asked her to tell me about the mentoring program:

> *And then ... as time went on here ... and I found myself doing other things when this mentoring program came up, she again mentioned to me, you know, "What do you think, Cherie?" And so I didn't have that instant "no" kind of reaction. And, you know, she just said ... "I really think that you would do well at it and that you should seriously consider it." And, so I hummed and hawed and did lots of thinking about it and thought, "Well, really this mentoring program isn't ... a for sure commitment." So I went in there ... under the condition that I was there just to see if this*

was something ... that I would be interested in doing. (pause) (Interview, November 8, p. 29)

Well ... they just started it last year. It's ... kind of under the AISI umbrella [a provincial government initiative promoting student achievement enhancement projects.] ... And so, you ... applied and then they ... chose people. John and I were actually both interested. So ... I took it last year and then he took it this year ... but, if there had only been one of us then we would have just stayed on.

...Basically the way we ran it last year was that I took care of all the literacy stuff and then, on the other days, I had an hour with her, from 2:00 p.m.- 3:00 p.m. We broke it up, so that ... twice a week I did AISI, ... that literacy thing and then the other three times I would be with her. ... It was near the end of the day so (chuckle) she would always have stories to tell me about what was happening. ... Penny and I would sit down and ... go through other issues she was dealing with that particular day or ... when she was doing teacher supervision then we'd go over the policy handbook and I'd get to know it and ... I actually went in to a couple of teachers' classrooms and ... did mini observation kind of things. Then we looked at the budget when it was budget time, she went over with me everything, that ... she was doing there. And one time there [were] teacher issues ... [and] she shared with me ... just to kind of get a feel of what she goes through. And ... [I would do] bus supervision or when she wasn't there, you'd be "acting principal" or whatever she would try. And there was time when a child would be having a problem, "Will you go in and talk to her and see what you can find out?' Just kind of give you experience that way. And, on top of that we also had ... [district] mentoring meetings where we were inserviced on administration ... so we would meet with all the mentorees and ... talk and they'd do sessions on like team leadership ... or they'd send out ... readings to us and stuff like that. (Interview, October 11, pp. 23-24)

As Cherie talked with enthusiasm about her beginning administrative experience, I was reminded of the thrill and excitement I experienced during my first leadership assignment with Shawna. Although we did not have regularly scheduled meetings like Cherie and Penny, we spent part of every day talking about the situations we handled, discussing the actions taken and planning together for future events. I thought Shawna's humour and willingness to guide me through this administrative experience provided me with a similar support and encouragement that Penny gave Cherie.

Shifting Forward to her Current Practices

From watching Cherie work with students, I saw the asset she would be when working with students who were experiencing difficulty. I noted in my journal how students thrive under her guidance. I wrote:

> *Cherie's directions and instructions are clear and concise and yet she always maintains that positive tone, but she is very strong about getting her message across to kids yet maintaining their dignity. (Journal notes, September 11)*

As I mentioned earlier, I believed Cherie valued the efforts of others and in the case of her students, she worked very hard to ensure they would be successful in their school program by supporting them with clear, concise instructions in a caring environment.

Moving Back in Time

In her continuing quest for continued professional growth, Cherie participated in the third significant professional development experience by attending a weeklong leadership course (subsidized by her school district) at the Educational Leadership Academy (ELA) during this past summer. During one of our first conversations in August, Cherie enthusiastically shared with me some of her experiences. She described why she was interested in this particular professional development opportunity:

> *Well, actually ... I was going to do it the summer before ... because I ... was considering doing this whole mentoring program. ... So ... put my application in but it was ... too late and they were full. ... That was one of the things ... I had listed on my application for the mentoring thing was that I was interested in leadership and that I was wanting to attend the ELA. ... I remember ... the year that Penny came back from that and she was just so pumped, you know, that was the year that she had got the v.p. job and she was ready to change the world. (laugh) So ... anyway, I thought, "Oh, yeah. I could do this." You know ... I don't know that I would have if I wouldn't have seen her the way she was after she had come back from it. (Interview, November 8, pp. 26-27)*

I was very interested to hear Cherie's story and the reason she was motivated to attend the Academy. Penny's enthusiasm for this professional development experience stayed with Cherie and motivated her to participate in, what she believed to be, a positive learning opportunity.

I asked Cherie what she found valuable about the leadership academy. She told me she had to reflect on her practices and professional beliefs prior to going. She found this reflection clarified her practices in the classroom. She told me:

> *I had to think about all my philosophies and that. ... My basic premise, as ... a classroom teacher, is that all the children feel comfortable in the classroom and that they're valued and they have respect for each other. And ... the teacher has respect for all the children and they [the children] feel ... comfortable, [and have] a comfortable learning environment where they can make mistakes, where they can take risks and also so that they're comfortable enough that you can push, too. I think there has to be a balance, you know. ... I've been (pause) called "the nurturer," you know, from other staff members ... but you know, I think you just can't be that to them too, because you want them to grow and to change and sometimes they need a little bit of a push. (Interview, October 11, p. 5)*

As Cherie talked about her philosophies, I found myself recognizing how many of her philosophies were expressed in action when I observed in her classroom. Students felt comfortable, valued and respected by her and in feeling such, worked to meet her expectations (Field notes, September 11, September 12, October 3; Journal notes, September 9, September 25).

I asked Cherie if the week-long conference at the academy helped her decide whether or not she would be interested in leadership and she told me:

> *(laugh) Well, I think that, yeah, they gave me some clarity there. It was pretty good, you know. I mean I found out that ... I kept wanting people to*

> *tell me why they liked this and why they would want to do that. But, really it has to come from yourself.*
>
> *I'm pretty secure and safe ... and don't have to take a lot of risks now because I know what I'm doing ... and so ... for me (pause) to take that extra step and go out on a limb, you know, and be ready to make mistakes and take risks and change and be in a new situation that ... I have to be more willing to do if I want to do this. And ... that's a challenge to me. (Interview, November 8, p. 30)*

As Cherie talked about the risks that came with change and moving to a new situation, I identified so well with her. In my first school as principal, we developed a strong and tightly knit group of people who not only worked together but socialized together as well. When I was unexpectedly transferred to my second school, I felt so lost that I quite often referred to the feeling as though I had been given up for adoption. I believed Cherie's awareness of the tenuous position "the new kid on the block" has, would enable her to develop coping strategies if she ever chose to place herself in that position.

Cherie told me she asked the administrators attending the academy why they were in administration. She shared their often humourous responses with me.

> *I kept saying to them "Why do you do this?" ... And they, of course, ... you always get jokes, really strange ones as to (laugh) why they do this. So, I had them do a David Letterman Top 10. I said, "Ok, get it all out!" So they did "big bucks" and "best parking spot," and all that stuff. And then I said, "I really want to know ... why you do this? So then they came up with 10 reasons why they really do ... like to be an administrator and ... that helped me but then ... after I did that, I thought that's not really...what I need ... to hear. ... I needed to hear, like the one principal said," You know I didn't know anything my first year." And you just think, as a teacher, [that] an administrator ... [has] all the answers, right? and then, to suddenly hear all these administrators saying, "I didn't know anything!" (laugh) (Interview, October 11, pp. 26-27)*

As Cherie told me this story, I appreciated that other principals experienced my reality as well.

I asked Cherie what sort of advice the administrators had for her. She told me:

> *Well, you know ... they said you gotta have a network and you gotta have people that you can phone and you have to have support and ... all that stuff. So ... that was kind of good for me. (Interview, October 11, p. 27)*

I believed Cherie appreciated hearing about how principal support networks were just as important as collegial support networks were for teachers. In my experience, I valued input from other staff members when dealing with a difficult situation but I found having principal colleagues to talk to provided me with a third "eye" at times when asking a staff member for feedback was not appropriate.

Cherie mentioned in both of our interviews that all of her administrators were very supportive of professional development seminars and literature. She enthusiastically talked about some of the other learning opportunities she's had.

> *So, I guess there was one other thing I was going to tell you. ... The administration has always been supportive in professional development and I think that's a big influence on ... a person ... I mean, we've always had it here but then it's always been encouraged. ... I've always gone to those "Bureau" ones and...I've just found that they are excellent and, and (pause) ... we like get the two a year. (Interview, October 11, p. 31)*

> *... Laurie and I ... had to do Science Olympics one year. And we went down to Red Deer in a snowstorm and observed this Science Olympics. Like it's worth ... way more than just reading about it to see it. (Interview, November 8, p. 25)*

She also talked about some of the inservices she attended:

> *Do these seminars and boy you walk out of there with tons of ideas. (pause) They've always been excellent so ... I hit lots of grade ones and the grade three one I got an audio tape for it because there was no session on it. And then this year, of course, with the phys. ed., I did the phys. ed. one. ... They're very valuable. ... There's just so many good ideas and new ideas. ... Lots of times, Penny'll put things in our box or like Elaine [the assistant principal]. There was one that Elaine put in my box. And ... I like to be organized and ... I guess, probably people would say I do too*

> *much for school. ... So, anyway, she had this little September newsletter and it just said what is too much for some people ... is not too much for other people and that you just need to know ... where your limits are.*
>
> *...And, you know ... I don't do these things ... to be better or ... just because I feel I have to, it's 'cuz I like to do it. (laugh) (Interview, October 11, p. 32-33)*

While Cherie was talking about her interest in professional development, I wondered if perhaps she experienced some type of friction from her colleagues. She told me that although she was pleased to be recognized for her efforts, she found the nomination for the Edwin Parr Award caused tension between her and some of her colleagues and she found herself justifying her first principal's nomination. She said:

> *And so I think, I guess I've had to try and ... justify that [to colleagues] sometimes because, you know ... like ... when I got that nomination for that Teaching in Excellence quite a few years ago and that kind of caused tension (pause) between some colleagues and stuff. ... That's one thing I put about influence, too, is ... your relationship with your colleagues can kind of cause problems.*
>
> *... I think now that ... a person's older, you don't doubt yourself so much ... like I think you get more comfortable with it ... Like that article, at [the] time, when Elaine gave it to me, was good for me because I thought ... I don't need to make excuses (laugh) for doing too much. If I feel comfortable doing this and nothing else ... is suffering in my life ... then that's ... my decision. But at the time, I think, sometimes you overcompensate or down play things, you know, just so that ... you don't get in people's ... bad book or (pause) not bad books, isn't the right word but, you know, just so that they're comfortable with you. You know, 'cuz sometimes they're not comfortable with you and it makes it difficult sometimes and, so, (pause) ... like I've had that good friend who encouraged me about the change ... that was part of it. You know, that was definitely part of it, but also the fact that I'd been teaching grade one for a very long time ... and I needed to grow and I needed to do other things. (Interview, October 11, pp. 33-34)*
>
> *... Like with this ... (pause) administration thing ... when Penny asked me way back when, initially, you know, it was like ME?!? (laugh) You know, it was like no way! And then ... she said, "Well, you should." See, she's always encouraging like go to this ELA thing 'cuz after I did the mentoring stuff and ... she's always saying, "Well, you, you know, you*

> *have a way with people, like you can talk to them and ... they'll listen and you can bring about change. Like ... some of the things that we've introduced to the staff ... but, that was another thing, too, ... last year, stepping out on that limb and saying I'm interested in administration. ... Some of the teachers went (gesture) (laugh) ... why would you want to do stuff or "ohhhhhhhh," kind of thing like that ... and the secretary kind of said, "Well, you're going to have to get a lot tougher skin, Cherie" 'cuz I'm still suffering from the softie syndrome. (laugh) (Interview, October 11, pp. 39-40)*

When I commented that being sensitive wasn't such a bad thing, Cherie told me the administrators at the academy shared my point of view as well. She said:

> *That's what they kind of said at this ELA thing, too. I mean, you [have] got ... [so] many different personalities and ... strengths and ... you always have the image of the person up there with the gavel, like, calling the shots and that's not necessarily [the way it is.] It's like many different styles of leadership and ... we took a leadership survey there, too and ... you kind of graphed where your strengths were and where your weaknesses were and then how you compensate for that. And, you know, I think it's like comparing ... the first year teacher to the experienced teacher, like a first year administrator to, you know, later on. Yeah, you might get, (pause) you know, caught a couple of times or whatever but then you learn. (laugh)*
>
> *... but ... that's whole "making mistakes" like I said to my son. [He asked,] "Well, what did you do?" " Well, I ... learnt ... that it's okay to make mistakes and there's ... you know ... administrators that say, "Hey, you're going to make mistakes and another thing is that you're going to have problems. Like, you know, so ... to think that it's going to be problem-free isn't real. (Interview, October 11, p. 41)*

After Cherie alluded to the conversation she had with her son where she shared with him how the Educational Leadership Academy experience taught her it was okay to make mistakes, I asked her if she would share the story of how that conversation happened. She said:

> *(chuckle) Oh, God! (LAUGH) Do I have to own up to this? (laugh) Well, we went on holidays, (laugh) and, we got a little brochure about*

unsinkable kayaks. They're just, you know, impossible to tip or whatever. (chuckle)

So, (chuckle) anyway, we, actually my good friend who teaches who I mentioned ... before, the one who encourages [me], like ... it kind of works out good because her husband and my husband work together and ... so they ... talk shop and then we talk shop.

So anyway, her and her daughter went with us and then there was me and my son and then my daughter and my husband. And, it was a pretty slow moving ... trip, you know, it was pretty noneventful. So, my son and I started fooling around. (laugh)

The deal was that ... you stay away from the edges and the trees and stuff, like that, right? Well, we weren't really paying attention 'cuz we were, nobody knows this, (laugh) actually going backwards. (LAUGH)

And then, there was a tree that was out and it caught us and caught me and it swung the kayak around. And, Daniel panicked and he tipped this way (gestures) and the water just started flowing in. (LAUGH) And here's my friend and my husband just, you know, peacefully (laugh) going down the river and they look over and (LAUGH) and we're hanging from the trees. (LAUGH)

And Daniel is just mortified, well, he's scared first. ... So, I'm thinking, "Oh, what are we going to do?" And, all of a sudden ... we remembered that it's not ... a really deep river. I thought, "Okay Cherie, stand up." So I stood up. Of course, I could stand up. So I said, "Daniel, just stand up." "Oh, Okay." (LAUGH)

So, anyway, we had to tip it over and everything and, you know, Daniel was pretty upset about this and then ... we got everything back in. Of course, we were the ones that were supposed to page the guy when we got to a certain point to come pick us up. Well ... we wrecked [the pager] 'cuz it was soaked. (LAUGH)

So ... anyway, these guys are trying not to laugh. My girlfriend's just trying so hard 'cuz Daniel is so embarrassed, right? He's just like, this is like, "Oh, my God" and my daughter's saying, "I'm sure glad I went with Dad." (LAUGH)

So ... anyway, that's when I said to him, "You know ... you got to laugh about this. This is just funny," I said. "You know, I mean, it's happened to us. We're okay ... and it was our own fault.," but ... like ... he's really self-conscious, actually, quite shy. So that was when I had said to him, "You know ... I'd gone this summer to a place where all the adults say that

... there's times when they don't know everything and they make mistakes. And we made a mistake. You know, we need to get on with it and then just make fun of it. Like ... just laugh about it." Well ... by the time we got up (to the end of our trip) and I had told this guy that we'd tipped this stupid kayak, he said, "Really?"

He said, "Maybe you'd like to send me an e-mail and explain to me exactly how it happened 'cuz it's never happened before." (laugh)

And, my girlfriend said, "Well, we don't know what happened either," 'cuz all I said was that we ... got caught up in the tree. So, she got into the van, and she just killed herself laughing. (laugh) She had tears rolling down. (laugh) But she wouldn't laugh in front of Daniel 'cuz she knew that he would be ... hurt by it. So, anyway, he laughs about it now. I even made him write it in his memoirs for ... when you get back to school, what you did this summer. I made him write it in there. (laugh) (Interview, November 8, pp. 30-33)

Moving Forward to Today

From watching Cherie in the classroom, I saw the support and guidance she gave students when they made mistakes. In my field notes, I wrote about an example of this. Cherie had given the class an assignment to work on and she circulated around the room to check for understanding. One of her more anxious students was writing his assignment in pencil crayon. She approached him quietly and said, "Please write with your pencil dear, not your pencil crayon" (Field notes, September 11). The student quickly switched to pencil and Cherie praised the content of the work he'd done to that point and then moved on.

Receiving Support from Others

During my three months at Meadowview School, Cherie also talked about the support she gets from Elaine (the assistant principal) and other staff members at Meadowview School. She told me:

> *But ... she [Elaine] always tells me to smarten up, you know, and not work, do too much. ... Like, she always tries to keep me in check. (chuckle) And I have ... our grade two teacher. She actually had ... health problems from, you know, working really hard and stuff so she always used to say, "Time to go home, Cherie." as she goes by and stuff like that. So they just kind of do that to me.*
>
> *... They're looking out for my welfare ... and the other grade one teacher used to do it, too. 'Cuz, you know, ... it's just a reminder check for me to make sure that ... I've got everything in balance here. (Interview, November 08, pp. 34-35)*

As I listened to Cherie talk, I knew she greatly valued the support she received from her colleagues. I believed she was aware of the need to be a well-rounded person as the balance she has in her personal life assisted her in bringing balance to her professional life.

Moving on to Tomorrow

During our last interview, Cherie shared with me some thoughts about her plans for the future.

> *I think down the road ... (pause) you know, ... I'd go into administration. ... Elaine always jokes I'm going to get her job. I don't know that I should stay here forever, either, but I live here now, so ... I've got a history here. But by the sounds of some other staffs, that yell and scream at each other (laugh) and stuff (laugh) it seems like this is kind of a nice place to be. (laugh) (Interview, October 11, p. 41)*

I believed Cherie valued the opportunity for formal and informal professional growth. From her stories, I heard how she looked for those opportunities from many sources. Principals, assistant principals, central office personnel such as superintendents, assistant superintendents and leadership staff as well as colleagues influenced her practice in many ways. Affirmation and recognition for a job well done, observing the way others were treated and having the opportunity for professional development through inservices and literature helped shape who Cherie was today.

CHAPTER SIX - JOANNE'S STORY

INFLUENCES FROM CHILDHOOD

Self-confidence is the first requisite to great undertakings.
Samuel Johnson (cited in Pickney and Whiter, 1997, p. 267)

I've heard it said one can learn to be a teacher but some people were truly born to teach. Although I knew it was not possible to prove this statement, it seemed to me if anyone could fit that description, my third participant, Joanne[1], did. When I first met Joanne in June, prior to our group meeting, she struck me as someone who was very confident and enthusiastic about teaching. While watching her talk with Cherie and Laurie, I believed she was also someone who established good relationships with her colleagues. As we relaxed and waited for Penny to join us on that sunny afternoon, Joanne chatted and laughed with Cherie and Laurie, and included me in the conversation whenever she could.

On my first official day at Meadowview in August, Joanne warmly welcomed me into her classroom and I immediately felt at home. As I glanced around the room, she told me this was only her second day in her new classroom, in the new wing added on to the school. I noticed boxes were everywhere and yet, as we talked about her plans to organize the room, I felt she knew exactly where every thing in every box was. As we worked together on that Monday morning, I was amazed at her efficiency and organizational skills, characteristics I would see on many occasions in the coming months (Field notes, August 29, September 5, September 12, October 11, October 18; Journal notes, October 16, November 7). She labeled student desks and lockers before students

1. Names of people and some places used in stories are pseudonyms.

arrived to help eliminate some of the initial confusion that often occurred on the first day of classes. When the students arrived two days later, Joanne quickly established daily classroom procedures and from the beginning of our time together there was no doubt in my mind students were in her class to learn (Journal notes, October 14).

During our first month together, Joanne and I shared many personal and school stories with each other. I often noticed she would have a twinkle in her eyes as she spoke with great affection about her current students and those of yesteryears. I believed I had only touched the surface of her experiences and was looking forward to sitting down with her and hearing more of her stories. When we talked about setting up an interview time, she invited me to tape the interview at her home over lunch one Saturday afternoon in October.

I arrived at her apartment on the designated Saturday and Joanne greeted me at the door with a warm smile and that twinkle in her eyes. As I entered her apartment, I was immediately struck with how Joanne's personality came through. Her love of the Maritimes and lighthouses were illustrated on a unique half circle painting near the front door. Candles and ornaments were tastefully displayed in an organized fashion on the coffee table and the wall units. Little personal touches such as the burgundy wainscoting trim and the drapery valances gave the living room a rich feeling.

As we sat down and talked on that Saturday and as the hours passed, I became more and more intrigued with her stories of childhood and teaching. Although she has formally

taught for twenty-nine years all over Canada and in Australia, working in various assignments at the elementary level, her teaching career really started long ago in a rural area in New Brunswick. She shared some of her childhood memories with me during our interview. The following story was her first story of teaching:

> *I guess as far back as I can remember, even before I started school, I wanted to be a teacher. We had a long, narrow kitchen and ... we'd line the chairs up, we all had our own little stool, our booster seat for the table ... so, we'd put the stool in front and the chair was our desk and I was always the teacher. Always. So I guess it was, you know, my destiny. (Interview, October 20, p. 1)*[2]

As Joanne talked about her love of teaching from an early age, I chuckled to myself thinking about these little tykes lining up chairs, and that, even in childhood, organizational skills were important to her.

Shifting Forward to Meadowview

Many years later and with her childhood a distant memory, Joanne continued to demonstrate her passion for teaching. In the classroom I noted on numerous occasions her unfaltering energy and enthusiasm (Journal notes, August 29, October 19, October 25, October 31, November 15). In our interview, she told me she believed she has to do the very best job possible because all students deserved that commitment from their teachers (Interview, October 20, p. 49). Many times I marveled at her ability to do that as she kept her students focused and on task as a result of her organization and commitment (Field notes, September 10, September 27, October 18, October 25, November 1).

2. Some transcripts have been edited for readability. Most repetitions, laughter and pauses were removed.

Shifting Back to Childhood

While listening to her stories, I was intrigued as Joanne talked about the many incidents in her life where she was able to make significant decisions on her own. Decisions that, I believed shaped her into the teacher she was today. The following was the first of many incidents she shared with me:

> *I remember in, I guess it was grade eight, grade nine, asking my mother what route she thought I should take in high school because, at that time, you could take the academic route or you could matriculate in industrial arts or home economics. And ... she didn't say, you know, take the academic route or whatever, she said, "I'm not going to tell you what to do." She said, "You need to stop and think about what you plan to do when you finish and go the route that will best prepare you for that route. Interview, October 20, p. 2)*

From this story, I realized Joanne's mother had enough confidence in Joanne's ability to make good decisions, that she allowed her, at the age of thirteen, to make a life decision that would have long term ramifications. From listening to Joanne's stories and from observing her in class, I believed planning long-term goals both then and now were a strength Joanne has (Journal notes, September 12, September 29, October 16; Field notes, September 27, October 24, October 25, October 30).

Moving Forward to Meadowview

I found, from what Joanne said during our talks together and from what I observed in the classroom, she was very aware of her responsibilities as a teacher and the expectations she had for her students. She cited these student expectations in a simple four-rule chart at the front of her room. When we talked about the four rules, Joanne shared with me how she believed these were rules students could apply both in the classroom as well as for life (Interview, October 20, p. 47).

For me, the power of setting expectations and the effect of establishing routines right from the beginning were never more obvious than on November 1st, that awful 'day after Hallowe'en' when teachers, far and wide, pray for a professional development day so they would not have to deal with students and their inevitable sugar high. My field notes for that day read:

> *I'm astounded at how quickly these guys are back on track today. It's like it's just another day, not the dreaded day after Hallowe'en! Expectations from the beginning of September really pay off here. (Field notes, November 1)*

Sliding Back in Time to Childhood

Following her talk with her mother, Joanne made the first of many choices that shaped her future. She said:

> *I was going to a rural school at the time, a rural high school. So in grade ten, eleven and twelve, you specialized in academics or in the commercial program, home ec. or industrial arts. So I went into the home ec. program. I'd been in 4-H. I had, you know, before school I was sewing and I was always (doing) artsy-craftsy type things and I thought, "Well, I ... want to be a teacher of some sort and my interest then was home economics." So, I matriculated in home economics and applied to go to teachers' college in the home ec. program. (Interview, October 20, p. 2)*

I believed from listening to her story, Joanne developed the skills to evaluate and make informed decisions at an early age and these skills assisted her in later life when making decisions related to her professional practice.

Shifting Forward to Today

In addition to her highly efficient and organized classroom, I had the opportunity to see the integrated programming Joanne offers her special needs students. She did an

excellent job of multi-level planning so that all of her students will be successful (Journal notes, October 18). When I talked to her about her ability to do this, she shared the following story with me:

> *Probably the person who has influenced me on how I work in the classroom is the last teacher I had at the elementary level because when I went to elementary school, I was in a one-room school with eight grades and when I went out and taught on local license (after high school), I didn't have any idea where I was going. I found myself teaching a lot of the ways and doing a lot of the same things she did. (Interview, October 20, p. 37)*

Since early childhood, Joanne has known that she wanted to be a teacher. And since that time, I believed she has developed and refined an organized, structured classroom that enabled students to be successful.

INFLUENCES FROM THE BEGINNING TEACHING YEARS

> *Go beyond yourself and reach out to other people with a Sincere love, respect, caring, and understanding of their needs.*
> *Susan Polis Schultz (cited in Pagels, 2000, p. 20)*

As we chatted on that Saturday afternoon in October, Joanne told me she applied to teachers' college in grade twelve. However, in order to enter the college, the college advisors suggested she improve her high school French mark. This meant Joanne had to wait a year before she could retake her exam and start her post-secondary education. Her formal teaching career, however, started the fall following her high school graduation. She told me:

> *My French was a little bit below what was acceptable, everything else was fine and because they had such a big enrollment, they suggested that I wait until the next year. Anyway ... I was prepared to work for a year and that was fine with my parents. So, I was in the process of looking for a job in the Moncton area, which is where I was living and one day a knock came to the door and there were some trustees from a school district in*

> *northern New Brunswick where I had grown up until I was twelve. ... They couldn't find a teacher for their two-room school and they heard that I had finished ... high school and wasn't going to teachers' college, so would I be interested in accepting the position as a local licensed teacher on local permit. So, I had a talk with my parents about that ... and, naïve as I was, said, "Sure." So away I went. Eighteen, no experience, no training. (Interview, October 20, p. 3)*

When she told me this story, I was awed at Joanne's courage and decision. I know I would have had second thoughts about an offer such as the one she received. However, from Joanne's telling of the story, a lack of training and experience were not deterrents for her. From observing her over our three months together, I believed this was because of the many skills she possessed. One of these skills was her resourcefulness.

Joanne told me when she started her teaching career, curriculum resources were not as readily available as they were now, so it was up to her to find out what she needed to ensure that her students were successful. Joanne took the initiative to seek out others and asked them for help to assist her in her new assignment. She explained her situation to me:

> *I taught grades one, two and three, had about twenty-five students ... in an old two-room school that we were in until the end of October and then we moved into the new school in November. ... The teachers' conference there was the first two days of the school year where we normally have our teacher work days. So ... I thought, "Well, where do I go? What do I do?" I had no idea! So, I had met the lady who was teaching the grades four to six and ... she was right near the house where I was boarding. ... She said, "Well, what ... do you want to do?" I said, "I need to know something. I need to know how to get started." So, this was ... a couple of days before school, so I thought to myself, "The grade twos and threes have been in school for a year or two already. They can help me so I will go and find out what I can do for grade one." So I met with grade one teachers and they gave me all kinds of ideas and things that ... needed to be done at the beginning of the year. So that's how I started. (Interview, October 20, p. 3)*

During her first year of teaching, Joanne relied on the support of her colleagues to provide her with ideas for programming and the implementation of them.

Sliding Along the Temporal Dimension to Today

Throughout our time together, I saw Joanne still valued input and suggestions from her colleagues, and she invited my feedback as well. She frequently worked with her grade level partner – providing art suggestions and social studies material. During class time, she would often engage me in the classroom discussions. When I was with her class, Joanne encouraged students to seek assistance from either one of us, making me feel part of the classroom team. I would often work with students one-on-one-helping with math, language arts and social studies revisions (Field notes, September 12).

During my time at Meadowview, I ended most mornings in Joanne's class. Following student dismissal for lunch, she and I often discussed the activities of the morning and student participation and achievement. I found our discussions helped me in a variety of ways. We talked about specific students who we felt needed assistance, students who were progressing nicely and some of the specific things I had worked on with them. I was also able to talk to Joanne about available resources and the different ways she approached the concepts being taught. Although I wasn't sure this information would be helpful towards the completion of my research, I felt our discussions added to my knowledge as a principal. Our discussions were candid and open and I always felt Joanne was treating me like an equal, valuing my input as a colleague as well as teaching me

more about life in the classroom today (Journal notes, August 27, September 13, October 18).

Sliding Backwards in Time

As the first term continued, Joanne continued to rely on her resourcefulness as she was on her own for the entire time without any direct supervision.

> *In those days you still had to maintain a register and there was a triple foldout sheet at the back. And this foldout sheet [had a] ... return sheet [that] had to be completed at the end of the first term and submitted to the superintendent's office. ... There was a space on that sheet where you were to record the number of visits and the length of time that ... someone from the superintendent's office visited. Well, I filled mine in. I didn't have anybody in those four months. I was on my own. (Interview, October 20, p. 4)*

Even without support or supervision, Joanne carried on throughout the first term. However, her local license was only valid for one term and by the end of that time, Joanne had not heard anything about teaching during the second term nor had she heard about a teacher to replace her. When the second term arrived, with still no news, Joanne resumed her teaching duties.

> *I still didn't have a permit to teach the second term but they didn't have a teacher either so I just went back.*
>
> *So, second day back in January, knock, knock, knock on the door. There was somebody from the superintendent's office. Now, you know, with the help of this lady in grade four to six, I knew the basics that I needed but I also had the presence of mind, that, if I was teaching three grades and if I didn't write down what I was going to do, I'd be up the creek. ... So I just got an old scribbler, that I wish I had saved, and I just wrote down what I was doing at each grade level and ... what my tests were going to be and any other little ... incidentals that I needed for the day and that was on my table. When the visitor came from the superintendent's office, that was one of the things she looked at and she wrote a note in there. And I remember the comment, it [said] ... that I was doing a good job being an inexperienced teacher and [she] recommended that I would continue on in*

> *the second term because the local permit was only for one term and my permit came along in the mail. (Interview, October 20, pp. 4-5)*

Joanne carried on for the rest of the second term and when her first year of teaching on local license was completed, she reapplied to attend teachers' college to become a teacher. She told me:

> *At the end of the year, when I was applying to go to teachers' college again. ... I went in with the grade twelve's and wrote the French exam and passed it and applied to go to teachers' college but they looked at my first application [which was] still home ec. ... it was full, they wrote back and (asked) me, "Would I be interested in going into the elementary program? And I said, "Absolutely," and at this point, I ... was still leaning towards home ec. I think ... I was at teachers' college about two weeks and I remember I was sitting in an art class and ... a knock came to the door and ... the principal of the college came and asked for me. (He) asked me to pack up my books and come with him and explained to the art instructor that I'd be moving into the home ec. program. So, you know, this big question mark popped into my mind, like, "Do I really want to go or not?" So we're talking as we're going up the hall, the principal and I and he said, "We've had a ... vacancy occur in the home ec. program. ... You were on the list stating that you preferred home. ec. We're giving you the option of going in." And I said, "Actually, I'd like to stay back in the elementary program." And then I told him about the year I had just had. He said, "If you're happy, we're happy." And I turned around and went back into the art class and I've been in the elementary program ever since. ... That year, I think, was ... a real turning point for me because, I don't think I would have enjoyed the home ec. program nearly as much as I do working in the elementary school. (Interview, October 20, p. 5)*

During our interview, Joanne shared how teaching a year on local license had tremendously influenced her choice to stay in the elementary program rather than transferring over to the home ec. program. Through reflection of her first teaching experience and the beginning two weeks of teachers' college, I believed she recognized the powerful impact she could have on children by staying in the elementary program, thereby creating a turning point in her career.

Joanne's first teaching job following graduation from teachers' college was in Moncton, teaching grade four. There she had an opportunity to work with a principal for the first time.

> *I got a job ... back in the Moncton area with a great principal. He was just a wonderful principal. He was in charge of three schools. He worked out of the high school but he had two elementary schools at two different locations. Both of them were full so I was teaching a grade four class in the old two-room school across the road.*
>
> *I had been there, oh, maybe a month, not very long and had met other people teaching in the school. ... I was living with a girl who was also teaching for the Riverview Board and ... Brian Gillis who had graduated when I did. He was our driver, we didn't have a vehicle so we all drove to school with Brian. We got attached to this local hockey team in Moncton and they were playing in some important game in the fall. Now, I don't remember just what it was but I know it was in Nova Scotia, so we had to go down into Nova Scotia and we were gung-ho to go to this. ... My principal ... had heard about this and hadn't said anything to me but the night before we were to go to this hockey game, he ... phones me at the school. "Joanne, I just want to let you know that John Hildebrandt is going to be in town and ... wants to come into your classroom to see how things are going. There are some things he needs to discuss with you." John Hildebrandt was the methods instructor that I had at teachers' college and he and I had a really good relationship because he was really interested to hear that I had taught the year before. ... Some things he was telling [in class] were really good ideas. He'd ask me and I'd say, "Well, I've tried something sort of like that and yeah, it works," or "no, it didn't work for me," ... so we had a good rapport during class. Anyway, ... the principal said, "Yeah, he'll be ... in town. He'll be in first thing in the morning and ... he wants to come into your classroom for the morning." And I'm thinking, "Okay, the rest of you, I hope you enjoy the hockey game, you know, I can't go out," 'cuz I thought the world of John Hildebrandt and I wasn't going to screw up for him, you know. So he [my principal] just kibitzed for a while and I thought he was being so serious and he said, "Joanne, have a good time at the hockey game." So, he ... showed me that ... principals can be human, you know, because ... they were always sort revered ... when we were going through school. (Interview, October 20, pp. 6-7)*

While we continued talking, Joanne went on to tell me how her Moncton principal had influenced her practice in many ways. She believed he taught her one of the most

important qualities in teaching was a sense of humour. Joanne's principal felt comfortable enough to tease her and showed her he cared enough to really want her to go and have a good time. By doing this, he also showed Joanne he didn't always take things too seriously – that humour was important as well. From this experience, Joanne told me she began to realize that humour was also important in her classroom, too (Interview, October 20, p. 7).

Shifting Forward to her Current Practices

Joanne's comments reminded me of the many times various people have used their humour to help me get through difficult situations in school. My administrative assistant from my previous school was particularly resourceful in this way. When she sensed I was a little more stressed than was good for me, she would run into my office with bubble packaging, throw the packaging on the floor and pop the bubbles by vigorously jumping up and down on them. As soon as I glanced up from my desk and gave her "the look", she'd stop, grab the packaging and make a beeline out of my office without saying a word. Memories like this story would stay with me forever. I knew I would never be able to look at a sheet of bubble packaging with a straight face. From listening to Joanne tell this story, I imagined the humourous hockey experience with her Moncton principal was similarly linked in her mind.

I observed Joanne using humour on several occasions in her classroom. I was reminded of an example of this when an incident occurred one morning during the daily announcements. At Meadowview School, "O Canada" was played throughout the school

on the p.a. system. In every classroom, students and staff stood at attention and everyone sang along with the recording. On this particular morning, the new p.a. system failed to played the anthem. After standing for several moments and realizing that there was, yet again, another problem with the p.a. system, Joanne announced that she was sure that the students were all singing "O Canada" to themselves (Field notes, October 11).

Sliding Back to Moncton

In our interview, Joanne shared several other qualities that she admired about her Moncton principal.

> *He had his serious side. I had a lot of respect for him and he had a lot of respect for his teachers as well. He provided them ... that opportunity to be independent. If we ... were doing something and we ... ran it by him, he had nothing but praise and encouragement for you. (Interview, October 20, pp. 7-8)*

Joanne believed her principal influenced her practice in two more important ways, by respecting her independence and by supporting the decisions she made. She told me he earned her respect by demonstrating his respect for her. She said she valued being allowed to independently make choices in her classroom. His praise and encouragement showed her he supported her work (Interview, October 20, pp. 7-8).

On Her Current Landscape

Joanne used praise and encouragement with her students on a regular basis. In my field notes, I wrote about her constant use of positive reinforcement in the classroom and how genuine her feedback was to her students. An example of her feedback occurred after announcements one day in late September.

The music teacher had announced the start of choir practices and Joanne asked how many of her students were planning on joining. A large number of students raised their hands, including several boys. She told them how pleased she was that so many of her students were going to participate and specifically mentioned the boys who raised their hands. She went on to share her beliefs about how important it was for students to show their commitment and responsibility when joining these types of activities (Field notes, September 26, October 18).

Returning Again to Moncton

As she continued to receive praise and encouragement from her principal in Moncton, Joanne found her self-confidence began to grow.

> *I guess I've always been, in a way, intimidated by other people who were older than I was because I never felt confident in myself ... and he showed me that I ... could have that confidence. And if I had problems with parents, which I did have that year, he backed me one hundred percent. And there were other principals I've worked for that didn't do that but, you know, because of the influence I'd had from him and the guidance I'd had from him. ... I think he had a ... great impact on what I did. (Interview, October 20, p. 8)*

From listening to her story, I believed her principal's confidence allowed Joanne to build self-confidence and take risks in her practice. She continued to talk about her principal's influence in the following story:

> *There was another situation the second year ... he transferred me down to the second elementary school that he was in charge of and it was undergoing renovation and one class need to be housed in the basement of the church next door. So, ... he approached me and ... told me, "I think you could handle this, being away from the main school by yourself." And he said, "We'll do anything we can to support you." And he said, "I'm only asking, don't feel you have to do it. But he said, "I have the confidence that you can do this." And because he had that confidence in*

> *me and expressed that, I felt, "I can't say no to him." (Interview, October 20, pp. 8-9)*

Connecting Yesterday with Today

Joanne also looked for ways to build confidence in her students. One of her strategies was by selecting some of her special needs students for the school's "Student of the Week" program at the beginning of the year. She told me she liked to recognize the students who struggled to succeed by acknowledging them early in the year as they often got lost in academic expectations as the year went on. She believed by selecting them early in the school year, she encouraged them to achieve by demonstrating she had confidence in them (Interview, October 20, p. 48). She spoke about her Moncton principal's influence in this area as well:

> *He would come in and he'd sit in the class, just to see how things were going. And he always had a kind word to say, he always had a kind word, he always had praise for the children and ... I remember particularly the children who struggled. He always took time aside to spend with them and I think that that really touched me that he did that. (Interview, October 20, pp. 8-9)*

I believed the actions of her Moncton principal, giving students' praise, particularly to students who struggle, had a compelling influence on Joanne. The importance of this type of praise was an integral part of how I saw Joanne in the classroom. I watched how Joanne's encouragement and support affected one of her student, Wayne, in early October.

Wayne was a lad in Joanne's class, who lived with his father. He had many learning difficulties which he battled with on a daily basis. During the second week of October,

he had his homework done everyday and it was obvious to Joanne and me, he was putting a great deal of effort into his schoolwork. All through the week, Joanne acknowledged his work and I believed her encouragement motivated Wayne to push himself more and more. As a result of his efforts, Joanne submitted his name for "Student of the Week." Unfortunately, I was unable to be at the school when his name was called over the p.a. system. Joanne told me about his reaction:

> *I wish you could have seen his face. He was just so excited. When he ... came back ... he said, "I can't believe I got this! Look what it says!" ... He went home just walking four or five inches taller, you know. (Interview, October 20, pp. 48-49)*

As I laid these two stories side by side, the story of Joanne's respect for her Moncton principal and his praise and encouragement for her efforts and Joanne's work with Wayne, I was able to see the threads from her beginning practice and her practice today.

Moving Back in Time and to a New Place

Early in her career, as her confidence grew, Joanne began to look at new challenges to take. One day, during her second year in Moncton, she read an ad in the newspaper advertising for teachers in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories (now called Iqualit, Nunavit). She shared the following story:

> *I jokingly took this ad in and showed him [my principal] and I said, "You know, I think I'm going to apply to go up North." And he just looked at me, and he said, "Are you crazy? Why would you want to lose such a good place as this?" ... It was a hard decision for me to make but I thought, "I'm young, I want the opportunity to experience different kinds of people, different situations when I can. And ... he was really happy for me. He wrote a great recommendation and ... after teaching with him for two years, I packed up my bags and headed to Ottawa for a two-week orientation to the Northwest Territories. (Interview, October 20, p. 11)*

I believed Joanne developed the confidence to apply for this job partially as a result of her Moncton principal demonstrating his belief in her and by providing his support and acknowledgement of her efforts. As a result, this confidence enabled Joanne to risk new experiences and opportunities to grow as a teacher.

Over the three months I worked with Joanne, she continued to share how her principals' support influenced her practice. She told me:

> *I've had great support, you know, from principals. ... My second year in Frobisher Bay, I had a little girl who ... had a lot of emotional problems ... and we didn't know at the time but she had been giving teachers, prior to me, a lot of grief and difficulty in the classroom as well. And I guess the straw that broke the camel's back in my class was one day, when I had everybody in phys. ed. and she went to the bathroom, so she said. But when I got back into my desk, I had had a black felt pen that you could refill with ink and she'd taken it all apart and the ink was all over my desk and all over papers and it was a mess. And I had a lot of difficulty with her prior to that, we'd had her dad in and, of course, you're working through an interpreter, you know, with the parents but I just told the principal, I said, "She's out of my room or I'm on the plane tomorrow morning," because I'd tried everything with her and nothing seemed to work. ... I never thought I'd speak to a principal like that but I was adamant. I thought, you know, it's not fair to the other children, it's not fair to me and it's not fair to her to have me on her case all the time. So, I said, "It's me or her." And ... the next morning she was in the classroom next door to me with a man [and] she was an entirely different child.*
>
> *[My principal] said, "You know, I knew you meant it." And I said, "I did." I said, "I didn't think I would ever say that ... or that I would do that but, this was a case that ... something had to be done and it meant I was going to be gone and somebody else in there, fine." And he said, "I knew you meant it." ... He realized he had to do something, but again, he gave me a lot of leeway. ... He didn't really question what I was doing ... in the classroom or ... whatever I was doing, I always had support from him. So I had a lot of respect for him, too. But I ... would have gone and I would have left him in that situation. I have no doubt about that. (Interview, October 20, p. 16)*

From this story, I was convinced Joanne learned the importance of determining the limits of her influences in her classroom and the importance of naming them. She was aware she was unable to provide a good learning environment for her students due to the behaviour of this little girl and she needed to make a stand. The confidence she had developed, based on her past experiences, taught her that she didn't need to be afraid to talk about the difficulties she was experiencing and to define her limits.

Moving on to Fort Simpson

After two years in Frobisher Bay, Joanne decided to look for a new challenge and transferred to Fort Simpson in the western Arctic. It was there she received her next opportunity to design her own program much like she had done when she taught on local license. However, this time she had the support and encouragement of a principal.

> *I had been there maybe a month in grade one and at the end of our first month when we had our staff meeting, teachers came together and everybody was lamenting and complaining that they all had one or two children in their room, who were really causing havoc. And in my own class of grade one, there was this little five-year old that had come in from living ... off the land. Couldn't sit on a chair, couldn't hold a pencil, you know, couldn't colour, nothing. [He] had no sense of self-discipline as far as sitting and listening to stories or anything. And then I had children who had been in kindergarten twice and had come into grade one and I had children who were repeating grade one so I had all these different levels and then I had this little Dennis. And I just, I didn't know what to do. I was doing the best I could. But I thought, there's got to be something else that can be done. So he [Dennis] was the problem that I brought forward at this meeting. So the principal said, "Well, maybe we should look at removing all of these children who are causing problems and put them together in a class by themselves ... maybe grade one and grade two, grade three at the most." And everybody sort of chuckled, "Yeah, and who's going to teach them!" And, you know, he said, "Well, I'll leave that up to you. If anybody is so inclined, come and talk to me." And then we went on with the staff meeting and ... you know, I mulled it over in my mind for the rest of the staff meeting thinking, "I know what these other teachers are going through knowing what I was going through*

> *myself." And ... then I went, "Bite the bullet, girl. See what you can do." So I went to him after and I said, "You know, I don't know what I can do with them but I know what the other teachers are feeling. And I said, "I'll try and do something with them but I don't know what to do." And he just said, "You do what you can with them. Teach them to read soup labels if you want to. They have to learn. We'll give you all the support you ... need. Just come to us." So I have a lot of admiration for him, too. And he ... put me way down at the end of the hall. Gave me fifteen children and they were from age five to nine. Little Dennis was one of them. So I put them in the room and I'm thinking to myself, "What in the world am I going to do with such an age range?" (Interview, October 20, p. 18-19)*

From our conversations, I believed when Joanne's principals demonstrated their respect and support for her work and she respected them as well, her confidence enabled her to risk new and unknown situations.

The new program working with special need students, again, put Joanne's resourcefulness to the test. Relying on the support and confidence of her principal, she was given the independence to design her own program for her students. However, without a curriculum and materials for students with behavioural challenges, it was up to her to use any resources she could to teach this active and challenging group. She shared this story with me:

> *I lost ten pounds that year without trying. They'd get really rambunctious and I'd think, "I have to get them out of here." So one day, I went to the office and I said to the principal, "You know, I need to get them out of the school. I'm going home to change into a pair of slacks." Now, I lived right across the road from the school. I said, "They're yours for about five minutes. So, "Oh, okay," off he went [to the class]. I came back and he just shakes his head as he walks out of the room. About a month after I was in the program, the principal came to me and ... told me how impressed he was with what was going on in the classroom, but he said, "Don't ask me to come in there and teach them again!" He didn't want to do that. The principal gave me the authority to do what I thought was best for the kids at the time. He was there, if I needed him, and ... I think the principals I ... have had, have shown me that I can ... be a strong person in my own classroom and that what I'm doing is okay. And I know ... if I*

> *see that I'm making mistakes, I'll go back and try and correct them. And I've had such a variety of children, particularly in that room that I guess I have a soft spot in my heart now for the kids who ... struggle because these kids really struggled. (Interview, October 20, pp. 21-22)*

Joanne shared some of the strategies she used with her students to "hook" them into learning.

> *I knew the ... industrial arts teacher quite well so I went to see him. And I said, "Will, I need ... wood, I need sandpaper, I need nails, I need hammers, I need saws." I said, "Anything that you've got that you can spare, bring to my room." So he did. So those kids, I'd say, "Okay, it's woodworking time," and they'd all scramble to this box and they'd grab pieces of wood. And they'd saw it into a shape that they'd wanted and they'd sand it down and we'd painted it and they built these abstract wood things. It was just great! And while they were doing this, I thought, "There's got to be some other teaching stuff going on here, too, you know." So, I got a Danny Kaye record (pause) and, it's one of these records where he tells folk tales. And, (pause) I put it on the record player, turned it up full volume, couldn't hear it playing. Couldn't hear it playing for all the noise and so on in there. And then one day, you wouldn't believe it, but two little guys, over near the record player, and I heard them say, "Here it comes! Listen! Here it comes!" I played this record every day, every day, every day. And finally one of them heard something and, you know, by the end of the year, I was still playing that record and they were all sitting on the floor listening to the story. Now ... these were special ed. kids before we had special ed. classes. (Interview, October 20, pp. 20-21)*

As I listened to Joanne tell this story, I was impressed with her resourcefulness. She asked the shop teacher for scrap pieces of lumber to use for building mini projects to help the students focus yet enabled them to move around the room. She used old Danny Kaye records to help her students develop listening skills and later told me how she used the outdoors to provide them with an opportunity to run off energy while teaching about the world around them.

Shifting to Today and Providing Learning Opportunities for her Students

Over the years, Joanne continued to provide her students with opportunities to participate in unique projects in the classroom while supporting the learning outcomes for their academic level. During my research period in September, October and November, her students worked on an "apple" unit that crossed the curricula (Journal notes 25/10). In early September, I had an opportunity to review many of the unit materials to be covered and noticed most of the assignments were ones which addressed a variety of ability levels. I also noted in my journal:

> *We're doing the story of Johnny Appleseed to go with their theme on apples. Joanne is a very creative lady with lots of really neat ideas and wonderful student projects for display that I think I'll steal them and take them to my next school, wherever that may be. (Journal notes, September 5)*

During our time together, Joanne shared many of her students' creative activities with me. Student compositions such as "Through my winter eyes I see," their apple art projects and their social studies island home assignment were projects I believed other teachers would appreciate knowing about. I marveled at how she was about to provide activities for such a range of student abilities.

Confidence Building Over Time

The confidence Joanne developed as a result of the support she received from her principals in Moncton, Frobisher Bay and Fort Simpson played an integral part in her next story. I further learned how Joanne provided enriching experiences for her students when she shared this Fort Simpson experience:

> *This one little boy, Jason, ... had had such a hard life and ... actually he was a guardian of ... one of the relatives of the principal's family from another community and ... his father had abused him, they had burned him with cigarettes when he was young. ... He had also witnessed his father kill his mother. He had terrible scars, terrible scars on his body and I had such a soft spot for him. He was living in a hostel and I went to the principal and I said, "Look, if I,(pause) if I could, I'd like to take him home to New Brunswick with me for the summer." And he said, "You know, he's never been out of the territories." ... And I said, "I realize that I would have to go through social services but, I need your support in this." And he said, "Yeah, I think it would be wonderful for him." So he really helped me, you know, with social services to get all the work done. He went and spoke to the people in Jean Marie River. I flew in with him and explained, that if they would let him come home with me for the summer, that I would make sure he would get back to spend a couple of weeks with them before he had to go back to school. People at the hostel were so good, they provided, you know, his wardrobe and social services provided everything he needed. He had <u>such a great time</u>. <u>Such a great time.</u> When I got him back home, the principal again met us. He couldn't get over the change in Jason over the summer and we flew back in to Jean Marie River. (Interview, October 20, pp. 25-28)*

I was so touched listening to Joanne's story about her young student, I couldn't help but wonder how many other teachers have unshared student stories as powerful as this one. The more time I spent with my participants, the more I discovered the many ways these teachers had influenced their students.

Joanne went on to share what she learned from her year with this challenging but special group of children.

> *It was ... <u>such</u> a good program, you know. And it ... was all "fly by the seat of my pants." You know, ... I think that's where ... I started doing the integrated program that I like to do with the kids now because it meets a lot of the individual needs of the children and it meets their individual learning styles. And I try to put in enough things to challenge, you know, the better kids and still ... I have different expectations, I guess, for the different ... kids that I have. And I had to start that with this special class ... I had. And I don't think that I could have handled it without the support of the principal in that school at that time. (Interview, October 20, pp. 28-29)*

From listening to Joanne talk about this special class, I believed she developed many of her skills accommodating the various abilities of students from this experience in Fort Simpson. I also thought Joanne recognized the importance of having principal support and affirmation of the work she did.

OTHER CAREER INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED JOANNE'S PRACTICE

This world is but canvas to our imagination.
Henry David Thoreau (cited in Pinkney & Whiter, 1997, p. 166)

While working in the special needs class in Fort Simpson, Joanne met her soon-to-be husband, Grant. She talked about Grant and his support for her work with her students with behavioural challenges.

> *Grant was ... in the phys. ed. room ... so, every once in a while, I had a child who has really, really hyper or whatever, he said, "Send them to the gym and we'll do something with them there." And they'd go down there and run off some energy and come back when they were ready and, you know, that was really good. So ... we lived there for a year after we were married. Grant taught in the school and I was there and I had my daughter Anne that year. (Interview, October 20, p. 30)*

Moving Forward in Time to a New Country

Joanne and Grant moved down to Calgary to have their daughter. After about three years, they embarked on another adventure that would take them half way around the world. Joanne told me:

> *I'd come out to Calgary to have Anne and then we moved to Calgary. Grant taught there for three years and then he applied to go to Australia. We'd gone to one of these travelogue presentations and they were looking for teachers in Australia to (pause) come in and relieve some of their teachers who were going for upgrading. ... He applied to go and he got a position in Queensland so we went off to Australia. And, (pause) I got the*

> *house and stuff settled there and found I had time on my hands so I (pause) went to work in a geriatric hospital as a nurses' aide ... I worked there for three months and I loved it! Loved the work! But, (pause) I was working shift work so, I wasn't getting to see the country. Grant and Anne were tootling around, you know, meeting different people. (Interview, October 20, pp. 30-31)*

As Joanne talked, I couldn't help but wonder, "What next?!?" I was amazed at the breadth of her experience. Little did I know we were only about half way through her professional story.

When Joanne realized she was missing out on sharing many unique experiences with her family, she decided to teach in Australia. She explained:

> *So, when I realized that I ... wanted to teach, you know, and sort of have the same holiday time that Grant had which would enable us to travel, I applied to have my teaching evaluated back here ... while I was doing the ... nurse's aide work. And then I taught the next school year in Australia. And that was a different experience. I was just outside of Brisbane, I had a grade four class for a couple of months (pause) only because there was a vacancy. They didn't have a teacher, they were still looking for a teacher there. In the meantime, one of the teachers in the grade six shared classroom was going back for upgrading and the grade four teacher ... came back. And, so they offered me the team-teaching position in grade six. So I took that and I taught the math and the social studies. ... They were on the metric system and that was my first introduction to the metric system. Social studies ... is social studies but, I had to learn everything because it was all about a new country and a new curriculum and so on. And the girl I was working with ... then did the other language arts and the science. (Interview, October 20, p. 30-31)*

While Joanne was talking, her voice took on a "matter of fact" tone. It appeared to me, she was more than willing to accept the fact she would be faced with new curriculum and readily met the challenge.

As I sat listening, Joanne went on to describe her experience with her Australian principal, an experience that proved to be very different than her previous ones. She explained:

> *The principals [there] ... were really (pause) intimidating, I guess, to staff and students, particularly the one at our school ... (pause) I'd be teaching and he'd just walk into the classroom. The classrooms were very open, windows, doors, everything were open and he'd just walk into the class and start talking. If he had something to say, he'd interrupt the children, he'd interrupt the teacher. And, the first couple of times that happened, I was just taken aback. Like ... I stopped doing what I was doing. And he'd just carry on and then he'd walk out. (pause) And I thought, "Well, there's something wrong with this picture." But I knew the respect that women were given in that country as well, you know, and I thought, "Oooo, I don't know whether this is a, a reflection ... of that or not." (Interview, October 20, p. 31)*

As mentioned earlier in her story, Joanne held principals in high esteem in her childhood. In addition to this high esteem, I believed, in her previous teaching experiences, Joanne and her administrators had developed a mutual respect. While listening to this part of her story, I realized Joanne's foundation had been shaken somewhat by her Australian principal's authoritarian approach. Joanne went on to tell me how she dealt with this situation. She said:

> *So ... after it happened the second time, (pause) I was a little prepared because I thought I could be jeopardizing my job but if I'm doing something, I'm going to continue with it. And, so a third time, it happened. He came in and he started talking and the kids automatically look and I said, "Grade Six, I'm speaking. Look at me, please, 'til I'm finished." And he started to talk and I kept right on talking. And ... you know, I cut it off fairly quick but ... I finished my train of thought and then, I just turned to him and said, "Yes, Mr. Brownman," and then he (pause) said what he had to say and then he left. By the end of the year, if he had something to say, he'd come to the door, he'd knock on the door, he'd stand there with his hands folded if I was speaking and when I recognized him, he'd speak to the class. So I don't know who I taught more to that year. (Interview 20/10, p. 31-32)*

When Joanne finished telling me how she handled this situation, I was again reminded of her intense professional commitment I had witnessed during my time at Meadowview. I also recalled how important it was to her to teach her students not only the school curriculum but also her "four life rules" which included: Be on time; Be prepared; Be considerate; and Respect yourself and others (Interview, October 20, p. 47). However, from listening to Joanne, I believed she found it very difficult to establish a level of respect for her principal. She went on to say:

> *He, (pause) he was a person I found, (pause) didn't really stand behind his teachers. He really didn't stand behind the parents. He would believe the children before he would believe the teachers. And I saw evidence of that. I saw two teachers ... leave the school because of the lack of support they got from him. And ... I was just determined that wasn't going to happen to me. I wasn't disrespectful in what I did. I didn't feel I was. He never directly came and told me that (pause) he appreciated what I was doing or he liked what I was doing. (Interview, October 20, pp. 32-33)*

As I listened to Joanne talk about teaching in Australia, I was saddened to hear about the lack of principal support and affirmation she experienced. However, knowing Joanne as I did by this time, I was confident she would not let this be a barrier for her.

Joanne told me she did receive some acknowledgement from her Australian principal in a round-about-way from one of her colleagues. She shared the story with me:

> *I remember one situation, the librarian in our school was just a lovely person. I had her son in Grade Six and I had (pause) done ... the outline for a social studies project that I had wanted the children to do. It was a research project. And I took it to her so that she could pull books and have areas ready for us to go in and do research. Nobody in the school had ever done that. They went in, they chose books to read, they left, went back to their room. And I wanted them to do a research project in the library and, you know, I was going to do the ... research teaching and he happened to see the outline of the ... project, on her table. ... I provided a copy for her so that she knew what was going on. He came in and he told her that he was impressed with how I laid out the work and what I was*

> *doing but he never once told me. I got it second hand through her. (Interview, October 20, p. 33)*

From listening to Joanne's stories, I realized that, although she appreciated receiving the validation and secondhand feedback from her colleague, she would have valued hearing it directly from her principal more.

Joanne was not able to establish the same level of trust or respect with her Australian principal she created with her previous administrators. As Joanne talked, I recognized she had not had a positive experience with him and she confirmed my perceptions when she told me:

> *The evaluation that I got from him at the end of the year, it, it was okay. It was a mediocre evaluation. Yeah. Probably, (pause) I wouldn't say the poorest but probably the weakest evaluation that I got in all of my teaching. But I know I did a good job and that's what counted. I certainly got recognition from the parents that I worked with, you know, whose children I worked with. (Interview, October 20, pp. 33-34)*

As Joanne reflected on her experience in Australia, I sensed she felt it was regrettable she was not able to have a collegial relationship with her principal similar to the relationships she had with her principals from Moncton and Fort Simpson. However from listening to her story, I believed she was able to separate her principal from the students, parents and colleagues she worked with during this time and in doing so recognized what was most important to her: her students and their learning.

Moving Back to Canada

Joanne and Grant finished the Australian school year and, with Anne, returned home to Canada. She explained to me:

I taught for the full year and then Anne was (pause) ready for school. She'd been in kindergarten there. She was ready for school and after having taught in the public schools, (pause) I thought, "No, we're going to take her back to Canada." The private schools there were excellent. They were all church affiliated. They were excellent [but] ... it was hard to get your children in and it was even more difficult to get a teaching position in them. I think that it was ... just a period of time, I don't know that it's like that anymore but we thought ... it's time we go back home. It's been a great experience for us. We met wonderful people there (pause) but it just ... wasn't a situation that I wanted to be working in.

So we came back to Calgary. I went to work. I didn't teach. I hadn't taught in Alberta. I still didn't have my degree at that point so ... I couldn't teach in Alberta. I was at home again with Anne and Grant was teaching. (Interview, October 20, pp. 34-35)

Returning to the North Country

Joanne told me she and her family spent three years in Calgary until they were offered another opportunity to work in northern Canada. Joanne shared:

After three years ... we went back up north again to Norman Wells. Grant had a chance to go up as a principal and I was hired to teach up there. And, I had good recommendations from the North. I had experience from there so, I went up and I was given a classroom of thirty-two students, grades three to six, in a portable classroom. And, (pause) ... the first year that I was there was a really trying year. I had a student come in, in grade six, I found out, who had been won in a card game, in a poker game. And, just a lovely boy, really nice boy, I had a really soft spot for him because I knew his background, you know. The second year I was there, he and a couple of friends were out racing in a truck and unfortunately, Charlie died. (Interview, October 20, p. 35)

As Joanne told me her story of Charlie, I was reminded of how many children had touched not only Joanne's life through her years of teaching but mine as well. Sometimes these children touched our hearts with joy and sometimes, as was the case with Charlie, with sorrow. Unfortunately, I, too, have a "Charlie" story. I remembered when I was teaching Grade 5/6 in 1984 and 1985 and had a student named Collin who

struggled and struggled and struggled. I also remembered telling his mother over those two years how I just did not understand why Collin was having so much difficulty learning and how I felt that something was wrong. And just like it was yesterday, I recalled when Collin's mother called me, at my new school the next year, to say he had been diagnosed with a brain tumour the size of a baseball and was only given a short time to live. She went on to say how much she had appreciated my support in recognizing that perhaps something was physically wrong with him rather than to reiterate his previous teachers' comments that he was just lazy. My memories of Collin, just like Joanne's memories of Chuck, remained etched in my mind and my soul forever. I often wondered if perhaps I could have done something more for him that would have prevented his early death.

As Joanne talked about her experience in Norman Wells, I found it very interesting to hear her talk about her new principal, her husband. She told me:

> *It was a great situation, you know, where my husband happened to be the principal at that time. And, he was very good. He ... tried to be very fair. There were three (pause) other teachers, three teachers and himself. He was teaching as well. So, there were four classrooms. We had a lot of support from ... the district at that time. The superintendent would come in and the assistant superintendent would come in. And, (pause) the first year in Norman Wells, I walked into that classroom, there wasn't a textbook I was familiar with. I had to get used to all brand new textbooks. Again, I had taught in Fort Simpson so I was, you know, I knew the learning styles pretty well of the native children but I had a lot of children who were from southern families as well that I had to accommodate. ... And, (pause) ... I remember the first time the superintendent came into the school. He was wondering how things were going and he was asking about curriculum and the size of the class and (pause) he looked at my day plan. I had a loose-leaf binder opened flat, each page divided in half grade three/four; grade five/six. And I had a parent volunteer who fortunately would come in and, (pause) and, ah, help out with language arts in the morning. And I had told her, I said, "Anything written in red,*

> *you can do." So ... I got around the program that way. I spent a lot of evenings at the school, I had to. But it was, it was a good experience as well. (Interview, October 20, pp. 36-37)*

As I listened to Joanne's story of Norman Wells, I found this chapter of her life story to be interesting in several ways. I believed having your husband as your principal created a situation where you would have to ensure some balance between home and school. I was also intrigued to hear Joanne speak of the visible support the district, particularly the superintendent and the assistant superintendent, provided Grant and her. And finally, to hear Joanne so calmly talk about teaching four grades and, yet again, a new curriculum left me in awe of her organizational skills.

Shifting Forward to a New Place

Joanne and her family left Norman Wells and moved to Inuvik when Grant was offered a new position with the school district. She told me:

> *And then from there we moved on to Inuvik because Grant was offered ... one of the assistant superintendent positions. So then, I moved to Sir Alexander Mackenzie School. And, it was a much larger school, (pause) kindergarten to six. I spent four and a half years teaching in Inuvik, (pause) grade four, (pause)...I guess for four years and then kindergarten for the last half year. I knew I was going to be leaving at Christmas time, Anne was getting ready for high school and, we knew that we were going to be going at the end of the year anyways so we thought maybe Christmas time would be a good time to go so that she could get into a junior high and ... meet up with some friends that she'd be going off to high school with. (Interview, October 20, pp. 37-38)*

While I listened to Joanne talk about her experience in Inuvik, I was impressed when I realized the value she and Grant placed on providing their children (they also had a son, Glen after Anne was born) with what they perceived as the best educational opportunity possible.

Returning to University

Joanne shared with me that one of her goals after the family moved back to Edmonton was to complete her education degree. She talked about the next chapter of her life:

> *And then after we moved out here, I had planned to go to ... back to university to work on my degree. And, Grant was going back as well. And, (pause) ... we had sold property that we owned in Calgary and invested in the B.C. Teacher's Federation. Turned on the radio one morning to find that everything was frozen and that's when ... their [financial] problems came to a head.*
>
> *I had planned to, (pause) start off really easy, taking one course because it had been twenty years since I had gone to university. [I] had planned to [go back to university fulltime during my second year] until the B.C.T.F. problems came up. And, we were in the midst of building a house out on the acreage ... at the time so, that meant Grant went back to work, and I cut down my workload at the university and I worked part-time and I got a job in a school in Edmonton as a playschool teacher. ... Teaching playschool was altogether different. Like you had them at a certain level when they went into kindergarten and (pause) when I had taught playschool in Calgary, I had one hundred and ten students that I divided up into five different classes. I saw the three and half year olds once a week and the older children, the four and five-year olds I had two sessions a week. It was the only way I could get them all in. (Interview, October 20, pp. 39-40)*

By the time Joanne finished this part of her story, I was just shaking my head. She always seemed to be able to adjust to and handle any situation. Overcoming the financial change in their life, Joanne was able to complete her degree while working as a playschool teacher.

Moving to Meadowview

Joanne's next move was the one that brought her to Meadowview School. She told me about her final professional move.

> *Once I finished my degree, (pause) we were out on the acreage in this area so I'd gone to the school and just said that I was interested in doing*

> *some subbing maybe, (pause) went to the county and got on the sub list there. Got a lot of subbing in that first, I finished my work in December at the university, so (pause) from January to June that year, I got a lot of subbing work in. The principal's wife was terminally ill at the time and I got a lot of work in for him. We had a couple of teachers on staff here who were having medical problems so I got a lot of work there, too. And then in May of that ... year, I got a term position. ... I went in on a maternity leave.*
>
> *Meadowview is the only place I've taught in Alberta other than the playschool [in Edmonton and Calgary]. And, the following year, I was offered a point seven position [here] ... [and the next year] got fulltime work and I've been at Meadowview ever since in a variety of grades.*
>
> *I've been here, I think, fourteen ... years. ... (pause) And I hope to be when I finish. It's ... been great. ... I love the rural area. I really do. Ah, (pause) certainly the principals I've had out there have been good. Well, I've had two. I think the current one is (pause) by far the best I've had. (Interview, October 20, p. 41-42)*

I asked Joanne to tell me what it was about Penny that made her the best principal she had had. Although, initially she responded with uncertainty, the more Joanne talked the more reflective her words became. She said:

> *I don't really know. I don't know whether it's because she's a woman but she just seems to be more compassionate (pause) and just to have a better understanding. She's been in the classroom, you know, before she went into the office and I saw her as a teacher and I've seen how she has grown, you know, from the first time I met her as a teacher to ... being in the administrative role.*
>
> *She's got wonderful interpersonal skills (pause) ... from the children right up to the people in Central Office. And,(pause) she's highly regarded by the parents in this school and by the children and by the staff. She's very supportive of what goes on in the school. She's got a great sense of humour ... and, you know, she'll kick back with the rest of us and (pause) if she's made mistakes, she's not afraid to admit it. And I think she shows a very, very humane side that I, (pause) haven't seen as strongly in other principals that I've had. (Interview, October 20, pp. 42-43)*

As I listened to Joanne talk about Penny and her practices as a principal, I realized many of these were qualities Joanne appreciated in her other principals. These qualities

included Penny's sense of humour, interpersonal skills, desire for professional growth, support as well as the mutual respect developed between the two of them.

I was curious to know more about Joanne's perceptions of Penny and I asked Joanne if she would tell me a story that would better help me understand her. Joanne told me this very personal and poignant story:

> *I guess when my own marriage was breaking up ... I knew that she had gone through a similar situation when she was teaching in the classroom. We were coming home from some function one evening and she was telling me ... what was happening with her own family relationship and that she was going to be leaving. So I ... knew what she had gone through. (pause) And, (sigh) I was, I was at some loose ends when my own marriage was breaking up. I didn't know where to turn. And I turned to her. And she was very supportive, you know, she gave me, not necessarily advice but I had some questions like "Where do I go for..." and "What do I do next?" and that kind of thing and she just told me what she had done and what had worked for her. And she was very supportive in that and I think that I knew very well she kept an eye on me as ... the new school year started and just to see how I was doing emotionally and, you know ... how I was getting along in the classroom. And made sure that we sat down and had some talks and ... (pause) ... I don't know where I would have gone.*
>
> *I don't know who I would have turned to had it not been for her. You know ... I have our minister at the church is a very good person , he's a man. I just felt I needed a woman to talk to. And she was, she was just great. (Interview, October 20, pp. 43-44)*

As Joanne talked about Penny's support during her marriage break-up, I heard an intensity and solemn tone in her voice. I believed, through this story, Joanne recognized an additional aspect of support from Penny, one that encompassed the personal as well as the professional. Their past relationship, as colleagues and then as principal and teacher, was built on mutual respect and trust. This respect and trust allowed Joanne to risk sharing with Penny and enabled Penny to support Joanne through difficult times. I also

believed the talks they had and the fact Penny kept an eye on Joanne in a non-intrusive way further validated the respect Joanne had for Penny.

Joanne went on to share with me some of the other qualities she admired about Penny.

> *She knows the ins and outs about the kids and their families and if we want to know something, you know, that we don't find out from the children (pause) or from people who know, then we can go to her, she knows.*
>
> *I just ... find that she's very, very easy to work with. And we do work with her. Some principals, I've found, I've worked for them, they've given me that impression that I had to work for them. Penny lets us know that she is one of us and that we work together as a team. And, I like that, too. And ... she just does all these little things, like writing little notes and dropping them in the mailbox. She and ... the assistant principal as well. They work well as a team. And, they're very encouraging and very motivating and very inspiring. And that's what makes our plant run as easily as it does, I think. (Interview, October 20, pp. 44-45)*

From listening to Joanne, I again heard how much she valued principal support. I believed, in Joanne's view, Penny's efforts to promote a sense of team with her staff and her sharing of information about students and their families allowed the school to function in a smoother manner.

Joanne and the other participants spoke about the strong, positive impact Penny's notes have on them. I asked Joanne to tell me what it was about the notes that she found so inspiring and she said:

> *(pause) Well, every once in a while, I guess, you know, you sort of feel down on yourself. ... Or I sort of feel down every once in a while and think, "Oh, nobody sees what I'm doing and ... I'm trying to do the best that I can and I just seem to be on the kids all the time because I have a standard that I'd like them to work toward." And if I don't think that we're moving fast enough, and maybe my expectations are too high, but ...*

(pause) just at the right time ... they pop that note in my box that says ... "Your report cards are very goo,." and ... "you've done a great job," and "I know it's taken time." and so I know that they appreciate what goes on even though they don't always come out and say, people aren't always saying.

And I guess ... I don't think that I'm any different than anybody else but we're quick to praise children (pause) sometimes I think and sometimes we're not so quick and we should be and I think people need praise and encouragement in what they're doing. And more so, as we go on because the job doesn't get any easier. If anything ... it's getting harder with all the different things we have to cope with. And, those, those little notes and those little pats on the back (pause) that we get, I think, are really, for me, they work really well. I need those. (pause) Perhaps it's because I don't have ... family within my house. I don't come home at the end of the day and I can talk to people. And (pause) maybe I need that from the people I work with.

I think we all like to be told we're doing a good job. I like to be told if I'm not doing a good job, too. Because, if I don't see (pause) that something is going wrong, (pause) or something could be better, then I'm not going to learn by (pause) that either. (Interview, October 20, pp. 45-46)

Joanne shared Penny was the first principal who wrote notes to her. I believed Joanne not only appreciated the affirmation of good work and recognition of her efforts, but she also valued acknowledgement from her principal of potential areas for growth.

Joanne shared her memory file with me. In it were treasured notes and letters from students, parents and administrators as well as performance evaluations. As I read through her file, the comments made on these notes and letters reaffirmed much of what I had observed during my time at Meadowview. The notes from Penny and Elaine (the assistant principal) were personalized and focused on a variety of Joanne's strengths. I asked Joanne if I could read some of the notes out loud to record them on tape and she gave me her permission. They read:

> *This one is, ah, dated August 1st. It says: Joanne, Welcome back to school and to the main school. I hope you have (pause) a wonderful year in your new classroom and enjoy the new computer lab and quick access to the office and staff room. You did remarkably well under very extreme conditions last year which was a wonderful example of the true professionalism you unwaveringly display. You are truly remarkable and you continue to give your best to your students. I think you will really enjoy this group of children and they will love being in the new area of the school. I'm looking forward to working with you throughout the year and enjoying your great attitude and sense of humour in the staff room. Have a great 2001-2002 school year. Penny.*
>
> *(pause) Great job, this must have been from your progress reports. This is from Elaine. Great job, Joanne. You've made positive, helpful comments. Many of the students have made substantial gains. Be proud of the many successes. I noticed a lot of the same comments from students I had last year. Enjoy your holiday, you deserve the rest and relaxation. I look forward to working with you again next year. (pause)*
>
> *Here's another one from Penny: June 2000. Joanne, your reports are excellent and thorough once again. You continue to amaze me as you find the energy and stamina to do such a wonderful job. You are an inspiration to all of us. Hope you enjoy your summer. Penny. (Interview, October 20, pp. 50-52)*

As I finished reading these notes and letters, I was reminded of my memorabilia file at home in my den and how much I valued having the notes to read when I felt the need. I truly believed the notes she received validated Joanne, the teacher. I realized from reading her file how important it was that each note was a little different. Joanne confirmed my impression. She said:

> *Totally different. ... They're just so, they're just so inspiring. You know, you can feel down or you can feel "Ooh, I'm just so glad it's Friday afternoon," and then you stop by your mailbox on the way home and there's something in there, you know, and, um, it certainly makes your weekend and, (pause) they're great. (Interview, October 20, p. 57)*

From listening to the many chapters of her story, I believed Joanne valued the support and verbal and written affirmations she received from principals such as Penny. I

thought that her experience in Australia and the lack of support she received from that particular principal, provided her with a greater appreciation of principals who affirm her practices.

CHAPTER SEVEN - LAURIE'S STORY

INFLUENCES FROM CHILDHOOD

Never compromise your integrity.
Anonymous (cited in Pickney & Whiter, 1997, p. 171)

I remembered the first time I met my fourth participant, Laurie[1]. I was in Penny's office, anxiously waiting for my meeting with all four participants to start. As I sat there with knots in my stomach, Laurie came in, shook my hand and greeted me with a warm smile. As she talked with Joanne and Cherie, I was struck with the thought of how they all seemed so comfortable with each other and I wondered if I would ever feel half as comfortable in the school as they appeared to be.

It was not until Monday, August 27th, my first official day at Meadowview School that I got to know Laurie better. I arrived at the school with butterflies in my stomach. With the assistance of several people who walked me through the mostly completed renovations, I was able to get my bearings and was reintroduced to my teacher participants. Laurie welcomed me right away and invited me down to visit her grade six classroom, which was also located in the new addition to the school. The morning started off with a brief staff meeting and as with most "Welcome Back Staff Meetings," a portion of the meeting was devoted to staff members volunteering for various committees and school responsibilities. I noticed Laurie volunteered for several committees including the "pet" program. I was initially confused and a little anxious as to what this particular committee did. My heart started to beat rather rapidly, as I am allergic to animals and I was afraid that this "pet" program meant Laurie was going to have animals

1. Names of people and some places used in stories are pseudonyms.

in her room and I would have to look for a new participant. However, I soon came to realize that "pet" was "P.E.T.," a student peer support program that assisted students with playground difficulties at recess time.

After the staff meeting, I went down to Laurie's room to help her set up her classroom and I was surprised, yet thrilled, when Laurie said she was eager to hold our first interview. And so we sat down in two student desks, facing each other and Laurie shared her first story of influence with me.

Shifting Back to Childhood

During the course of my research period, Laurie and I met on three other occasions to discuss her teaching stories. However, it was through reading a letter written to the parents of her students that I received my initial information about her childhood.

> *I was born to James and Sarah McIntosh in the small town of Athabasca, about 100 miles north of Edmonton. My father inherited the farm from his Grandfather who homesteaded the land around the turn of the century. ... I am an only child who was raised knowing the meaning of hard work and responsibility. I studied hard, practiced piano and helped around the farm. When I graduated from grade 12 it was assumed that I would go to University. (Letter to parents-September 1)*[2]

In reading Laurie's letter, I began to have a better understanding of why she was always so focused in the classroom. Her classroom atmosphere always seemed to be "go, go, go, go" with students in perpetual motion (Journal notes, September 18, October 1, October

2. Some transcripts have been edited for readability. Most repetitions, laughter and pauses were removed.

15; Field notes, October 15, October 22, November 1, November 5). Although I was basically a city slicker at heart, I spent every summer from the age of 5 through 13 on my grandparents' farm in Saskatchewan. My time in Laurie's classroom reminded me of those summers gone by. There was very little down time for anyone. Everyone had jobs to do, sometimes together (picking bales) and sometimes individually (hanging laundry). So, too, did the students in Laurie's class have jobs to do – learning, sometimes together and sometimes individually; sometimes on the same program and sometimes on independent programs. And, like my grandfather, Laurie frequently oversaw about eight things at once and was always aware of what her students needed to accomplish (Field notes, 15/10). I wrote in my journal:

> *She's ... quite on top of her students. She knows what's done and what's not done and is very current with the students' assignments. (Journal notes, October 1)*

However, it wasn't until our fourth taped conversation that we actually discussed her childhood. She told me:

> *Mom was thirty something when she had me. I was a child with older parents and dad was a little bit younger than mom. ... Dad was a ... very talkative person who liked to shoot the breeze so to speak. He was always a jokester, you know, he was a teaser ... that's ... probably why I appreciate that in a principal. ... Mom was a hard worker, hard working both of them, just to the bone. You know, ... that's how I live my life, too, I just work ... like a fiend. (Interview, November 28, p.16 - 17)*

And Laurie does work like a fiend. I believed she has that old-fashioned farm work ethic where you knew what needed to be done without anyone telling you and you did it to the best of your ability. In my journal, I wrote:

> *I've noticed that in Laurie's class it's very go, go, go. There doesn't seem to be any down time there. ... They're making every moment count. I can't believe the multiple groupings that she does and the different things she has the kids doing to accommodate their learning abilities. It's pretty*

> *impressive. The kids seem to handle the multi-tasking quite well. (Journal notes, September 18, September 27, October 18)*

I believed Laurie learned from her parents' drive, determination, and commitment to be like them in her classroom so that she was able to give her students an opportunity to learn at their level, a class where the multi-tasking phenomenon was, to me, truly awe-inspiring (Journal notes, September 27).

INFLUENCES FROM THE BEGINNING TEACHING YEARS

> *Humour is mankind's greatest blessing.*
> *Mark Twain (cited in Pickney & Whiter, 1997, p. 163)*

We met in Laurie's classroom for our third interview. It was during this time she shared her story of how she came to be a teacher. Laurie told me she graduated from university with a degree in home economics and was hired as a Department of Agriculture district home economist for two rural counties. Her job required extensive travel, assisting farm families in areas of farm management, kitchen design, sewing classes for adults, judging at fairs and, as she says, "whatever they needed help in" (Interview, November 28, p.19).

During her first year on the job, Laurie attended her district Christmas party where she happened to sit beside the superintendent of schools. Throughout the evening they chatted and, at one point, the superintendent offered Laurie a job teaching in his school district. His offer greatly appealed to Laurie as she had discovered her current job only allowed her to touch the surface of things rather than allowing her to get intensely involved in what she was doing. She shared the following story with me:

> *As a district home economist, I had gone to the Christmas party at the county of Lansdowne and Wildwood was my main office but Lansdowne*

> *was my secondary office. And it was customary for their Christmas party, for the spouses to all go with somebody else. So, I happened to sit with the superintendent of schools. And we got chatting and he offered me a job that night ... I mean, you know, I was still a district home economist so, I went back and I got my year of education. And then, I think in about March, I went to see him and he gave me a bursary ... to make sure that I would come to the district of Lansdowne. Like it was totally after the fact because I had been hired already and he gave me the money. (Interview, November 28, p. 20)*

As Laurie shared her story of her beginning teaching years, I could hear her enthusiasm and passion. I believed her story of changing careers tells of how she was convinced of the superintendent's confidence she would be an asset to the teaching profession.

Laurie's first teaching assignment was teaching home economics in a city high school in 1969. Her first principal was a man who she affectionately refers to as "Boss." Laurie shared her stories of Boss in our second interview, held in the assistant principal's office on Friday during the lunch hour.

> *[Boss] was a fellow that did not allow people to get close to him but he did allow me to get close to him, like within ... his wall. He was ... a private person but I felt that we were very good friends and it also helped to have his wife was a home ec. person. ... She and I were very good friends.*
>
> *So, I used to just stop in, you know, and chat at their home and [we'd] enjoy ... each other's company. And he was a tease, a total tease! And you never could believe anything he said 'cuz he'd get a twinkle in his eye and he'd just turn you the opposite way when we were cajoling but, of course, when he was serious, he was all business. (Interview, October 19, pp. 1-2)*

Amid great laughter, she shared the following story with me to emphasize Boss' teasing sense of humour:

> *We did a study of various countries and we had dinner for the staff ... and some of the food was brought from home but most of it was done with our*

> *microwaves where we had ... Mexican and Ukrainian and Italian, Chinese I think. We had four different countries represented. And then, as a joke, he put a bottle of Eno at the end of table, (laugh) 'cuz there was lots of food and the staff, it was a fairly small staff in those days, but, ... we had all the food stacked on the plates and the Eno was right there [for] people who might have heartburn from all the different flavours but that kind of tells you the kind of teaser and character he was. (Interview, October 19, p.6)*

I recognized Laurie was drawn to Boss' personality, a personality similar to her father's. Boss showed his teasing sense of humour and his serious business approach on the school landscape. From listening to her story, I believed Boss influenced Laurie's practice through his sense of humour and the relationship Laurie had with him and his wife.

I asked Laurie if she thought the fact Boss' wife was her friend and a fellow home economics colleague influenced Boss' support for her home economics program and if so, how. She told me:

> *Probably a fair amount, because I think they live their whole life as that. You know, as I said, their whole house ... is just impeccably decorated and it's well lived in, you know, it's not that they're paranoid about that and his whole ... demeanor is definitely, and that was always a joke, too, that June dressed him. (Interview, October 19, p. 19)*

> *But I ... think it was because of this whole connectedness with his wife and his daughters. ... They were making Eskimo parkas for him and, you know, we'd compare our Eskimo parkas sort of thing and he was so proud of what was going on in the school with the creativity of the kids. (Interview, November 28, p. 8)*

While listening to Laurie's story, I heard the intensity of her commitment to her home economics program and teaching, a commitment which she continued to demonstrate in the classroom during my research period.

Shifting Forward to Meadowview School

In her classroom, Laurie's sense of humour was evident as well. On the first day of classes, she shared with her class how thrilled she was to be in a newly built classroom with everything so new and shiny. As she reviewed her expectations, she reminded the students they needed to remove their outdoor shoes when they came in or she might become "unglued." (Field notes, August 29). Following the review, Laurie provided students with a scavenger hunt activity sheet where they were to seek out other members of the class who met a certain criteria listed on each item such as someone who had: gone out of the country, seen the movie "Shrek," gone horseback riding, etc. Being part of the class, I participated in the scavenger hunt as well and although I didn't hear the specific conversations Laurie was having with her students, I observed lots of smiles and laughter as she mingled throughout her classroom (Field notes, August 29). On another occasion, Laurie's teasing sense of humour came through when, thrilled at a young man's accomplishments, she told him "I could hug you" and then, following a pause, added "but that's not cool" (Field notes, November 6).

I believed Laurie valued a sense of humour in her professional landscape to help balance her intense commitment to student learning. Laurie's sharing of laughter with her students was a strong thread in many of her stories and my observations. I began to wonder how much of her sense of humour was connected to Boss' teasing side.

Laurie also spoke about Boss' serious side. As Boss did, Laurie demonstrated she was all business when the serious task of learning was on the agenda. My journal notes read:

> *She's very firm with the students, very strict in expectations, quite on top of those kids though. She knows what's done and what's not done and is very current with the students' assignments. (Journal notes, October 1)*

Later in my research period, I again observed how intensely Laurie approached the task of student learning. I wrote:

> *Laurie is right on these kids about getting their stuff done and getting their work in and yet she doesn't seem to be, I mean, she's intense but yet she doesn't seem to be angry with them. She's able to joke and make comments with them. (Journal notes, November 5)*

Through our discussions, Laurie talked about how intense teaching could be for her and her need to achieve some balance in her life (Interview, November 28, p. 17). She told me:

> *I do a lot of things, like I walk, and I'm taking yoga and I do aqua-sizing and I try to have lots of laughter in my life. (Interview, August 27, p. 10)*

Whether it be her classroom or her personal life, I believed Laurie took an active part in everything she did.

Moving Back to her Time with Boss

During our many conversations, Laurie shared with me how important Boss' support was to her over the fourteen years she worked with him.

> *He was a...really...great guy. He supported me an awful lot. Home ec. was established by me at the school with his blessing. He felt it was needed, it was important and, you know, he would actually come to me sometimes and say, "Do you want to start a Foods Lab?" And of course, we didn't have anything like a stove but we had microwaves. ... He was quite interested in getting new and different things, and of course, I was the kind of person, too, that "Sure, well, let's do it!" (Interview, October 19, p. 2)*

When Laurie spoke about Boss, I was able to recognize how intensely she valued his support. She went on to tell me stories about her fashion shows and Boss' visible support.

> *He was very supportive, ... he encouraged me. I always had fashion shows ... and I had extravaganzas, I really did. The amount of work involved just about made me sick because it was stressful and I was having a greater difficulty learning how to deal with stress in those days than I have now. It's been a lifelong journey.*
>
> *But I would have ... the stage set up with a ramp and decorations and music and kids doing the commentaries, writing the commentaries firstly and then ... reading the commentaries and ... there was lunch. It was a big production and he was always extremely supportive, often would come, often the only man there (laugh) but would be very supportive. (Interview, October 19, p. 5)*

I asked Laurie if there were other ways Boss was supportive and she shared the following various ways he affirmed her practice:

> *Well, just ... his presence. Being interested, stopping in just casually into the classroom and being interested in what the kids were doing and ... like now if kids are doing something interesting, I often send them down but I wouldn't do that in those days. I suppose in a high school setting you just don't do that. But he ... seemed very interested in what I was doing and then when I had the microwave cooking lab that was pretty crazy, I'll tell you. (Interview, October 19, pp. 5-6)*
>
> *And, then, of course, the fashion show was just a huge job. It was just horrendous and before Christmas, you know, the stress levels were just tremendous and ... I would, every year I'd say, "Oh God, I've got to cut down." But then he would come on the scene and oh, it was just rave reviews and you know. I'd kind of be bragged up at the staff meeting and, you know, the press would be called out and the kids, there'd be pictures of the kids on the ramp and the whole bit and so ... it kept me going to do more, more, more. And some of the things, those ... students were doing were just phenomenal. Like a full length Eskimo parka with applique, you know, ... we were just doing really awesome things. Things that, well, you couldn't hope to do in a million years, now, you know, because people just don't seem to have the patience to ... do that and there's just not the time, I suppose. (Interview, November 28, pp. 7-8)*

Sliding Forward to Today

As I listened to Laurie talk, she spoke with such passion when describing Boss' commitment to her program. When watching her work with students in class, I noted her commitment to her multi-level program was incredible and mentioned this to her in our third interview (Journal notes, September 18, September 27, October 1, October 11). She told me:

> *Well, I think that I attribute a lot of that to the home ec. thing, you know, because you do individualized instruction with them. ... I mean you could get up there and demonstrate a zipper, demonstrate this, and ... you know, they don't see it ... so you have to come and show each of them and help everyone and everybody has something different.*
>
> *Yeah, oh, yeah. There's that connection there. Definitely. (Interview, November 28, p. 17-18)*

Sliding Back to Laurie's Time with Boss

After working at the high school for approximately twelve years, Laurie became aware of how extensive Boss' support was for her when the school facility underwent major renovations. She told me how Boss involved her in the designing of the new home economics lab and supported her design plans into becoming a reality. She said:

> *Near the end of his ruling there (chuckle) ... the school underwent a major renovation, major! And he really spent a lot of time with me planning. Planning ... the sewing lab and planning the foods lab ... but, (pause) you know, it was, "If you want it, you should have it. If you think we need it, we should have it." And he would go to bat for me. ... And it ended up that I kind of made a mistake according to the Alberta Government rulings. On every U-shaped kitchen, my common sense told me you need a stove on this side and a stove on that side of the U if you've got two groups of kids working but Alberta Education says, "Oh, no. You have one stove only." But he went to bat for this and there's double the amount of stoves in that foods lab than are required. ... So it turned out it was an extremely efficient foods lab and he was very supportive of anything that I thought we should have. Like, if I needed food processors, we got food*

> *processors. We don't need to get cheap, cheap, cheap, you know, we need to get quality so that it would satisfy the length of time we needed it. (Interview, October 19, pp. 8-10)*

From listening to Laurie, I believed Boss' on-going support and affirmation of the importance of her program was critical to her. Another characteristic of Boss she appreciated was his ability to delegate responsibilities within the school setting. She said:

> *Now the whole ... new wave of doing things, of technology, he didn't know how to turn a computer on but ... he would delegate. He was a great delegator. You know, so many principals, they've got to keep it all for themselves. Knowledge is power. But not him. No, if he didn't know how to do it, somebody else could do it. (Interview, October 19, p. 8)*

Over my three months at Meadowview, whenever Laurie spoke about Boss it was always with great fondness and positive memories. I had an occasion to meet several of Laurie's colleagues at a social one evening in October who had also worked with Boss. Laurie told me:

> *The group of people you saw at the card party, a lot of the high school people were kind of part of the fold ... and so all of those people liked him and, and enjoyed his company and, and his high level of wit and humour and the teasing, his kind of commitment. (Interview, October 19, pp. 4-5)*

I believed the relationship Laurie and Boss created was based on a mutual respect for each other. I thought this respect developed as a result of Boss' support for Laurie's program and his terrific sense of humour. As a result, I realized he strongly influenced her professional practice.

OTHER CAREER INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED LAURIE'S PRACTICE

> *Turn your stumbling blocks into stepping stones.*
> *Anonymous (cited in Pinkey and Whiter, 1997, p. 18)*

It was during our first interview that Laurie shared the following part of her story with me. While in the midst of preparing to set up the class for the first day of school, we sat down at two student desks, I turned on my tape recorder and listened.

Moving Back in Time to Thirteen Years Ago

Laurie had been working with Boss for about fifteen years when he was moved out of administration and into a junior high teaching position. About a year after Boss left, the following incident occurred. Laurie told me:

> *I'll just tell you about a scenario that, (pause) it just changed my life. It's probably the biggest impact. ... Let me see,[it was] fourteen years ago, I guess, that I (pause) experienced some very, very mean, I suppose it would be, administration, central office administration and principal that ... were vindictive and I was caught in the middle of it and it really made an impression on me. And, mind you, you know, I look at it from the point of view now, of it doing me a lot of good. It kicked me in the butt and got me to make changes in my life that maybe I wasn't going to do before.*
>
> *The [city school] district ... had recently separated from the county district and there were a lot of hard feelings there with those people. And I'm not even sure what they were but they [the teachers] took them very personally with the school board as well as the superintendent.*
>
> *But anyway, it all began when I ... was a p.d. coordinator for the current school district that I was working in and what happened was, we had gone to summer conference and [the]Alberta Teachers' Association asked us to explore the possibilities of our school district getting inservice grant money. And that money was earmarked to help teachers (pause) with new curricula. And there was a ton of it at that time and it seemed like there was just no help whatsoever, you know, and teachers were getting this new curricula and floundering and ... of course, (breath) okay, I'll take on the job. So I did and it cost me major grief.*
>
> *Anyway, what happened [at the A.T.A. conference] got back [to central administration] and ... the assistant superintendent, he sidled up to me in a meeting. And, (sigh) he (pause) I could basically tell he was trying to control me. Number one, I was a female; number two, I was a home ec. teacher and he was going to do what he darn well wanted. But he was trying to get my blessing for it.*

> *Now, I had a lot of close friends and a lot of people ... in [the] ... county that I still wanted to be friends with. I did not care to have ties severed because they ... were upset about certain things.*
>
> *And, (pause and sigh) I guess I didn't ... allow him to kowtow. You know, like take me by the nose and lead me around. And to make the long and short of it, that really upset him. It was very bothersome to him that I wouldn't ... play ball with him.*
>
> *So, (sigh), it [the meeting] went on and ... we were trying desperately to find out if we had this inservice grant money and if we did, why can't we access it so our teachers could get some help with this new curricula.*
>
> *[And they said,] "No, we didn't get it. No, we didn't get it. No we didn't get it." Finally, one of them, I didn't know whether it was the superintendent or the assistant superintendent, got so annoyed, he just said, "Yes, we got it! We just stuck it in general revenue!" And it was kind of like, "and what are you going to do about it?"*
>
> *So ... my teacher friends ... said, "Oh, isn't that a nice kettle of fish." But anyway, the bottom line was, Laurie got labeled as a troublemaker and (pause) I think I was blackballed at that point. (Interview, August 27, pp. 1-2)*

As I listened to Laurie talk, I recognized how she struggled with her position on the school landscape. Her relationship as an A.T.A. professional development chairperson with central office administration was difficult as she tried to position herself with teachers and inquired about the monies allocated for professional development and how she felt the administration was trying to deflect and redirect her inquiries.

As Laurie continued to talk, it soon became apparent to me, there was some direct fallout as a result of her inquiries. She went on to describe her situation:

> *So I was teaching home ec. I was teaching clothing and textiles and, as you may or may not know, clothing and textiles kind of became the way of the dodo bird and it was kind of in that transition period. But I had a really cool program and I taught ... mukluks and we did Eskimo parkas and wedding dresses and lingerie and ... all kinds of real cool things. ...*

> *We had done a major presentation for the junior high feeder schools and they came in and ... my numbers just skyrocketed but (pause) I was ... in the process of getting axed. So (sigh) ... I had friends that had computer printouts proving that there were many, many students there and they [central administration] ended up transferring me to another school and giving my job to a personal friend of the superintendent's. (Interview, August 27, pp. 2-3)*

> *The administration that I had ... two years prior to that, he [Boss] got the boot as well. Like they [the new central office administration] came in with the philosophy they were going to clean out all this riffraff and that was it. (Interview, August 27, p. 7)*

I believed Laurie found herself caught in an untenable position at school. Even though her student enrollment was strong, changes were about to occur. From her tone of voice, I realized Laurie considered herself to be part of the "riffraff" category that resulted in Boss being removed from his position. I wondered, after such a close relationship with him, what kind of relationship developed between Laurie and Boss' successor. I didn't have to wait long before Laurie told me about an incident that occurred in her second year with Boss' successor. I believe this incident basically summed up their relationship. Laurie told me:

> *I had gone to a parent council meeting. I was a rep and I can't even remember what the scenario was but it was something, (pause) something about graduation ... and it was a truth issue and I just said how it was truthfully, that parents had asked me. Next day, that administrator just got me in a corner and he just gave me heck like I have never gotten heck by any other teacher in my life! And he wanted me to <u>lie</u> to the parents. I'm sorry, I don't lie for anybody. (Interview, August 27, p. 8)*

> *I don't exactly know what the scenario was. But I know (pause) I was just dumbfounded when I got accosted the next day by not doing what he wanted to do and ... at the time, I didn't feel as if I was just looking him and saying, "Well, I'm going to darn well do it this way." That wasn't ... my intent. My intent was, somebody asked a question, I answered it. But it was the wrong answer according to him. And I was just stupefied to why this big to do was even happening. And, and I would guess. This was at the high school and that was just ... that year I got ousted. (Interview, August 28, pp. 11-12)*

While listening to Laurie's story, I related to her confusion. In my sixth year of teaching, I was the chair of our school's professional development committee and as a committee we had applied to take a modified first aid course on one of our school's professional development days. As a staff, we were willing to spend extra time after school to finish the course and to take additional seminars. The assistant superintendent, at that time, flatly turned down our request. He attended a staff meeting to discuss his decision and told us that no other school had been granted a request to use a professional development day for first aid. I was prepared for him to say this and had dates and school names to prove him otherwise. A heated discussion continued for about half an hour. Several days later, the assistant superintendent reversed his decision, much to our appreciation. However, upon meeting him at central office shortly after the staff meeting, he privately informed me there would be a personal consequence as a result of my actions that day. Later that year, he blocked a recommendation for my promotion. My memories of this individual still remain vivid just as Laurie's memories of Boss' successor do. She shared her feelings about this principal with me.

> *The one that gave me heck for telling the truth at a parent council meeting, he was and still is a slug. You know, he's just not a ... sharp man. (Interview, November 28, p. 22)*

When I reflected on Laurie's story, I believed her understanding of the fundamental relationships between principal and teacher had been shaken through lack of trust and respect. At the end of the school year she was transferred to a district junior high school.

Moving on to Junior High School

As I listened to Laurie talk, I sensed her confusion at the conflicting stories she received about the expectations placed on her by her principal; her pain as she came to realize her home economics program was no longer valued as it had once been; and her anguish trying to find a new place on her professional landscape. She told me about her transfer to the junior high school.

> *It was ugly. And some of my students walked out, there was a big walkout, you know, with media, CBC came out, the whole ball of wax and it was a great experience for the kids, in that ... I'm sure they learned more about life and ... trying to ... do the political thing than any class would have taught. (Interview, August 27, p. 3)*

As Laurie relived her story of her transfer from high school to junior high and the outpouring of support from her students, I, too, relived a time not so long ago, when a school issue involved the media and got as "ugly" as Laurie described. Calls came non-stop for comments and interviews from television media personnel. Parents and children were pitted against one another, staff were distressed and I didn't know which way to turn, talk or stay silent.

The stress of her transfer followed Laurie to her new assignment. She told me:

> *Anyway, I taught for a year at the junior high in the city and at the beginning of that year, the stress levels were just getting too much for me and I missed all of September. And in that process, ... I was used to teaching high school so I just had tons of stuff prepared before I got sick. And that was a good thing ... the lady that came to sub for me when I was sick, she had been there before so really she knew more about the junior high curriculum than I did. ... But I had this ton of stuff prepared and the principal said, "Well, don't worry about it." You know, this lady would take over and don't worry about it. But the superintendent said, "No, Laurie has to have all her lesson plans done." (pause) Now, is that not the epitome of meanness?*

> *Now, had I known then, like see, I had never experienced mean nasty people like that in my life. I always had an administrator that had been kind, supportive and wonderful and, you know, superintendents that, well, never bothered me really, nobody ever said anything, you know, like I always did my job and, in retrospect, I should have probably told him to take a hike. You know, 'cuz I was...really just a stunned bunny, I really was. I had such pain in my back and shoulders from the stress (snaps fingers) my body shut down, I don't remember most of the month. But I did have this great stockpile of lessons done (pause) and that's kind of what got me through. (Interview, August 27, pp. 3-4)*

I had no trouble identifying with Laurie's story, the meanness of the people and the toll the stress took on her physically as well as mentally. I believed when my philosophical foundation was shaken as was Laurie's, I floundered for a period of time as I redefined who I was in my professional world.

One of the few redeeming aspects of transferring to the junior high school, for Laurie, was that it was the same junior high Boss had been moved to. Laurie told me about his support during this very difficult time.

> *Boss was at the junior high when I got transferred there and, of course my attitude was very poor. But he was one of the friendly people that was there to comfort me. ... He went ... through a lot of the same. So ... when he was at the junior high ... he was the grade 7 social studies teacher with the principal's salary. (Interview, October 19, p. 4)*

Although Laurie was comforted by Boss' support, her year at the junior high school was filled with tension. She explained:

> *I never did care for that junior high school for whatever reason and I did a bad thing, I suppose. I, (pause) I allowed myself to be interviewed by the press which one should probably never do as they misquote and they say all kinds of goofy things. So then I had the teachers at the...junior high school not liking me very much because I was kind of blackballing their place of work which they loved dearly. So the bottom line was, I thought, enough of this nonsense. I need to be in control of my own destiny so there was a home ec. job out here at the high school at Meadowview and again that was going back to the county ... and I made*

> *that decision and I got the job and I haven't looked back since. (Interview, August 27, pp. 3-4)*

As I listened to Laurie share this story, I believed she realized she needed to take control of what was happening in her own life and to change her professional landscape into a positive one. I also recognized Laurie's decision required a great deal of strength on her part.

Central Office Administration Influences

To bring closure to this section of Laurie's story, I asked her to tell me how her experiences with central office administration influenced her. She told me:

> *Oh well, I understand the system. You see, that was kind of the preamble to the cuts that took place later and the preamble of what's happened with education and with all public sector. So it was a sneak preview and it kind of prepared me and I understand that system so very well now. ... That was one thing it did. Number two thing it did was it (pause) got me out of home ec., like home ec. was kind of a dying field. (Interview, August 27, p. 5)*

> *It seemed like we were kind of like golden children at [the] high school up until that time where (pause) we just had, you know, the same people or more people, nobody ever seemed to get the axe and certainly nobody with tenure got a transfer. And these people came in and they were totally different. Like we had superintendents that were kind of country folk, ah, the people that were with the county ... at that time and these people came in and they were quite different. They were slimy. Sneaky, you know, and I know many of the teachers would say, "Oh, well, they wouldn't, they couldn't." But I learned now that, oh, yeah, some people would and probably will. And I didn't know that about people before then. I guess it was my naivete, I don't know. But ... I honestly thought if you did a good job, if you worked hard, if you were an honourable person that nobody would do nasty things to you. And like ... I wasn't doing nasty things to anybody. I was doing what ATA [Alberta Teachers' Association] asked us to do. They were with their hands in the cookie jars, so to speak. And, I guess I should have known better but I didn't. Never again, though, will I ever stick my neck out to that degree. (Interview, November 28, pp. 13-14)*

As a result of this incident with central office administration, I believed the boundaries in Laurie's teaching world had been redefined. From listening to her talk, I thought she had become more protective of herself and a little more aware of self-preservation. She told me this situation, and governmental cutbacks, caused her to reassess her chosen area of teaching.

Moving Forward to the Meadowview High School

As mentioned earlier in her story, Laurie left the junior high school after one year and applied to work out in the county. A job was available in Meadowview at the high school. She told me:

> *So ... I came then to Meadowview High School and there was a new administrator then and I ... got along very well with him. He ... was very supportive and certainly helped with discipline and it was kind of an impossible task too, you know, twenty-eight kids in the class while teaching sewing. (laugh) ... And then ... as time went on I thought, I'm going to do something different here but it did give me that kick to get going and say, okay. ... The divorce kind of did that, too. I've ... got to survive here and I am not going to go back to being a vegetable like I was for that month of September. Probably that was the biggest impact. You know, because I ... honestly don't remember a lot of what that month involved other than ... the fact that I was to supply lousy lesson plans. (laugh) (Interview, August 27, p. 9)*

I believed Laurie's belief system was changed as a result of her experience with the central administration staff and junior high school. The on-going struggles caused her such personal agony, she revised her professional identity as a teacher.

Changing Career Paths

Although Laurie could laugh about her story as she shared it with me, I knew she experienced a great deal of turmoil in her life because at the same time she was

experiencing difficulties in the workplace, her marriage was also deteriorating. She decided to look at other alternatives in teaching. Laurie told me:

> *I decided to ... get a grad diploma in language arts and I went to elementary and I got a divorce in the middle of it all. (Interview, August 27, p. 4)*

> *It was sixteen months of crazy, crazy stuff and what's happened, is that it's been a very rewarding experience in that I feel very strong. I feel very healthy and I take care of myself now. (Interview, August 27, p. 6)*

Laurie talked about how she had to reevaluate her personal and professional landscape as a result of this chapter in her life story. She told me how the "meanness of people" had been a significant wakeup call (Interview, August 27, p. 6).

Laurie also shared with me an incident, which appeared to have a spin-off effect from her central administration story. She said:

> *It was very interesting because (pause) another teacher friend of mine went to teach in Samville and then he ran for school board. And the rumour was that the superintendent said that this Peter was under the Laurie ticket, it was as if ... he was running in my place and they deemed me to be much more powerful than I truly was. (laugh) Like, I was just a little toad in the puddle. (Interview, August 27, pp. 6-7)*

While I listened to Laurie talk about the rumors surrounding her friend's political campaign, I believed she was genuinely surprised to hear people imply she had an underlying influence on her friend. I wondered if the implication of influence or power started as a result of her tenacity over the professional development funds or if the ensuing media coverage played a factor in her assumed influence.

Laurie talked briefly about her junior high principal and two principals at Meadowview High School. She shared the following with me:

> *And, then I went to the junior high and I, I had a bad attitude there, I think the principal was probably fine but I had a really stinkin' attitude and I knew that I had to get out of that situation 'cuz it was eating me up. And then I went over here (gestures to Meadowview High School) and ... Don North was the principal. He later became the, the deputy superintendent for the county ... and he was an okay guy. I quite liked him and then Rachel was the next principal over there and then Penny. (Interview, November 28, p. 22)*

As Laurie reflected on her junior high principal, I believed she recognized how her transfer influenced her perceptions during her year there. Once she moved to Meadowview High School, I sensed she had begun to feel the impact of the provincial budget cuts while teaching the home economics program. Although she liked her principals at the high school, I feel Laurie looked forward to her new position at Meadowview Elementary.

Sliding Forward to Meadowview Elementary

Once Laurie completed her grad diploma, she applied to teach grade six at Meadowview Elementary School. She shared with me her first close experience with Penny.

> *Okay ... I'll just talk about my first, I suppose, together situation that occurred with the staff. We had all gone to the county centre and we were "Quested." And ... we had taken our own time to do this, as I recall it was Remembrance Day, I think. And we had, you know, been working all day long, heavy-duty work and enjoying it, though, as this group of people seems to do. And, so we're in a big circle, we're at the end and we're ... debriefing and the leader says, "And now you can kick your shoes off and you can," you know, "kind of go on with it." So Penny flicked her foot and the shoe came careening across the circle and it hit me BONG! Right in the left breast! (laugh) And I doubled over and she thought I was hurt and I was just in hysterical laughter. And so the next day, came to school, well, of course, I had to (laugh) make it larger on one side than the other.*

> *So that was the introduction of ... Penny. Like I had known her from September until November. But, of course, you're so busy trying to figure out what's going on and how to do the job that you're not really knowing her as a person so much. But that was the first introduction. (Interview, November 28, pp. 1-2)*

While listening to Laurie talk about the weekend retreat, I could not help but chuckle as I visualized the circle activity she described. I have also been "Quested" and remember how the two day seminar promoted collegiality and a sense of team. Knowing both Laurie and Penny, I believed they would see the humour in the shoe incident and Laurie's altered appearance at school the next day. Laurie previously talked about how she valued Boss' sense of humour and I believe this was a quality she also valued in Penny.

I asked Laurie to tell me how Penny influenced her practice over the six years they've worked together. She said:

> *While first of all, writing little positives, you know, and everything you seem to do ... we were asked to do whole units, at one time and ... we don't do that any more. But, whole units, and oh, all the work involved in that and, you know, the positive comments from that, the positive comments from my reports cards, the positive comments ... and always a little note, you know, a little note that says ... that ... I'm special. And you feel really good, you know, and I have a whole file folder ... of things. After my last experience of getting the ugly transfer, somebody told me, "Keep every one of those because if you ever have to go to court, those things are very important." and I've got a very chubby folder of positives.*
>
> *It is a staff of ... kindness, it's expressed, and, you know, I ... think I've probably been chastised a few times, you know, I'm certainly not perfect ... but it's done still maintaining my self-esteem ... and done in a respectful manner. (Interview, November 28, pp. 1-3)*

I believed Laurie valued receiving written notes from Penny which affirmed not only the quality of her work but Laurie as an individual. I recognized she accepted the fact

administrators may not always agree with her actions and she appreciated Penny's efforts to maintain her dignity when this occurred.

I asked Laurie to tell me of a story about an incident where Penny influenced her practice.

> *Well, there was one incident and that's probably the only time, I ... really had a parent who was ugly. And it turned out it was a fellow that Penny had dated at one time. But, the little boy, there were two boys in ... the family and they lived with the father and the mother had left the family to live with an older gentleman with money, from what I understand. The father was desperate to get married and he finally found a woman to go along with the idea. And so, Dad was remarrying and Mother was, I don't know, there were problems, major problems. And it turned out that this little boy was kind of a snotty little character. ... He, he looked like a little ... hotshot, a little bully ... kind of a tough little nut, you know, and I misread him. He, of course, was just a tender little boy that was crying out but, the parents were fighting, you see. The parents were in a major hassle and I don't even remember what came about but the mother went right to Central Office about me. What a terrible person I was, and I wasn't considering this little boy, etc., etc. And so, finally, I just hit her straight up and Penny was very supportive through this and it was a little uncomfortable due to the fact that she and Kenny had dated for a while.*
>
> *You know, I found it really, really difficult and that's maybe one of the reasons why ... it got sticky before it should have. But ... I had ... chatted with the father and ... made a comment, as I often do, about my own life ... and I was having some difficulty with my son at that time and I made mention of that. Well, he turned it back at me as if I hated my own son even. You know, how could I be a good teacher if I hate my own son and that isn't what I said. And then she, on the other hand, goes to Central Office and says what a terrible person I was. Well, it turned out I phoned her up and I confronted her head-on and I said, "Look I feel like I'm in the middle of a marital dispute here." And she backed right down.*
>
> *And it ended up, it smoothed right. But ... I felt a little uncomfortable. Penny was very professional. You know ... she was certainly on my side. (Interview, November 28, pp. 3-4)*

As I listened to Laurie talk about Kenny, I recognized how she appreciated the professionalism Penny exhibited when dealing with the issue. I believed it meant a lot to

Laurie that Penny had not allowed her past history with Kenny to influence the way she handled the situation.

Once Laurie finished sharing this story of Penny's influence in dealing with this difficult situation, she moved into another story of Penny's active involvement and support for a special student field trip she organized. She said:

> *So that was one incident. Now, I'll think of a positive one. I guess the first time that we arranged to go to Black Lake with the kids. And, uh, we had, we had a grant for something, something like $3000 from Embridge [formerly Trans-Canada Pipelines] and so we took the kids for three days. We ... lived in lean-tos for one night. The second night we lived in the dorm and then the third night we came home. And, that was a wonderful experience. She was so much a part of it and her daughter was in my class that year and ... she [Penny] went out and it was, you know, it was just excellent. And she was right in with the kids, like they had ... a ... salmon tin and [a] cardboard and paraffin wax and made a little cooker and then they made their own pancakes. They cooked their own pancakes over a big juice tin.*
>
> *It was quite roughing it but the kids had a whale of a time. And they were really good and the next year they weren't so good without her there. (laugh)*
>
> *I don't know what ... that's a sign of but, she was ... very supportive of that program. And ... it still is going but we've watered it down because of a lack of funds but it's still a very positive ... thing and the kids get out and enjoy the fresh country air and they learn something about the forest and they do archery and they do canoeing ... (Interview, November 28, pp. 5-6)*

From listening to Laurie's story, I thought she valued Penny's support and active involvement for her science enrichment field trip, in a similar way that she valued Boss' support for her fashion shows.

In our very first interview, Laurie referred to Penny and Elaine (the assistant principal) as being "just like saints" (Interview, August 27, p. 10). I asked her to explain her comment and she told me:

> *What we've gone through with this hellhole of construction, we could never have survived without awesome administration. (Interview, August 27, p. 10)*

Over our three months together, I realized Laurie appreciated the importance Penny and Elaine (the assistant principal) played in keeping the school team from floundering under the extensive renovations going on. I, too, marveled at their ability to stay positive amidst this chaos (Journal notes, August 27).

In our final interview, I asked Laurie to reflect on her years as a teacher and identify some of the ways principals have influenced her professional practice. She told me:

> *Well, I would think that probably number one is a sense of humour. Being able to cajole and tease and also someone who was very, very up with what's happening around in the world events, you know, and you can have an intelligent conversation about what Ralph Klein's been doing lately, etc., etc. You know, that sort of thing. So I would guess that would have a lot to do with it but certainly having a sense of humour and, and being able to rib and to take a rib, you know. (Interview, November 28, pp. 9-10)*

I believed Laurie valued a knowledgeable principal with a sense of humour most of all. She also shared with me several other things she appreciates about principals. She added:

> *I think ... having people skills, being able to listen, being able to understand, being able to make a decision, one who, who is fair ... someone who can manage the plant who and ... I suppose someone who can bark at kids, too, to get kids to smarten up, you know, like someone who doesn't allow the kids just to ride rough shod. (Interview, November 28, p. 23)*

When I reread Laurie's story, I recognized she was a person who believed truth and integrity were important. As a result, she valued principals who demonstrated truth and integrity as well as those who give positive recognition, support and affirmation of her practice. Perhaps most importantly, I knew she appreciated working with a principal who had a sense of humour and who used this humour in a variety of situations.

CHAPTER EIGHT - A SYMPHONY OF STORIES

The Opening Overture

In chapter one, I wrote about my awakening one evening at the Winspear Theatre as I watched Tommy Banks conduct the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. I talked about how the string section of the orchestra influenced the melodies played and tied the music of the other instruments together. I shared how the conductor used instruments such as the violin, viola and cello to emphasize different melodies just as a principal as learner, a principal as mentor and a principals as teacher were important plotlines used to play the melody lines in principals' symphonies of school. In this chapter, I reflect on the melodies I heard in my participants' stories. I begin this chapter with a little music theory to better highlight the influence of melody and harmony in musical compositions.

Musical Compositions – the Influence of Melody and Harmony

In musical composition, the melody is the character of the song that carries the story – it is the language that speaks to the listener. Melody enables composers to share with others their beliefs, their values and how their lives has been shaped. Throughout the musical score, the composer uses harmony to enrich the melody. The purpose of this harmony is to support the melody and ensure it does not become static or stand still. Harmony also gives the melody energy, allowing the melody to open up and flow smoothly. Harmony patterns vary within the melody and the more patterns used, the more the harmony works to support and emphasize the melody.

It is the conductor's job to interpret the music the way the composer felt it, looking at the relationship between melody and harmony. The conductor is the leader of the orchestra, just as a principal can be seen as the leader of a school. As the leader of the orchestra, a conductor is allowed liberties when interpreting the music, enabling the audience to experience the nuances the composer wanted them to feel. A principal, as leader of a school, is also allowed liberties, such as accommodating individual student and community needs, when interpreting government and district regulations. These liberties enable a principal to best organize his/her school. As the researcher in this study, who is interested in hearing teachers' and a principal's stories of influence, I believed my job was to listen to the melodies in the stories my composers (participants) shared with me and interpret the harmony patterns played within them.

Moving Backwards to Meadowview

In the principalship, there are many melodies played during the course of any day. Over our three months together, Cherie, Joanne, Laurie and Penny shared stories which spoke of principals' melodies. Some of their story melodies were short, some were long, some were about joyous celebration, and some were laced with sadness and sorrow. As I reread the narrative accounts of the participants, I was reminded of the different types of arrangements a symphony orchestra plays. And like the songs played by an orchestra, each of their stories contained a melody with harmonic patterns.

I spent a great deal of time looking at the stories shared with me and selected two from each of my participants that, I believed, had the greatest influence in shaping their

professional identity as related to my research questions. As I examined the stories I selected, I found the melodies were written in a similar pattern, a pattern that played through all eight stories. These melodies at Meadowview School primarily related to supportive principal-teacher relationships or, in the case of one story, the lack of a supportive relationship. However, as with any composition, the story melody of support moved up and down as the harmony patterns varied in each story. It was the harmony patterns that gave these stories their colour and energy.

Using Support as the Melody Line – What the Research Says

Terrence Deal (1987), a researcher in the area of instructional leadership, was among the first to recognize literature related to principal influence disregarded several significant dimensions of schools. He argued that multiple lenses must be used when examining all aspects of schools because principals direct their attention to other important areas in addition to instruction. He said:

> They [principals] must be instructional leaders as well as counsellors or parents, engineers or supervisors, contenders or referees, and heroes or poets. As counsellor/parents, principals add to personal growth and development with praise, advice, and affection. (p. 18)

This nurturing aspect of the principalship, according to Deal (1987), Beck and Murphy (1994), Deal and Peterson (1990), Evers (1992) was one of the most demanding and time-consuming for any principal.

Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998) discovered that experts concur no single leadership style has proven to be most effective in the school setting. However, the research they

examined showed there were skills and dispositions generally demonstrated by effective principals. They shared:

> Among the skills are communication (especially listening) and organizational ability. Among the dispositions are modeling strong character and democratic principles, displaying flexible problem-solving skills, and conveying caring and empathy. (p. 119)

Seyfarth (1991) believed that "in effective schools, the principal exerts leadership by supporting and encouraging staff and by serving as an advocate of change" (p. 16). To better understand what was meant by principals supporting their staff, I turned to House (cited in Ubben, Hughes & Norris, 2001, p. 25) who stated "supportive leadership is leadership that includes giving consideration to the needs of subordinates, displaying concern for their welfare, and creating a friendly climate in the work unit." Tarter, Bliss and Hoy (1989) found a principal's supportive behaviour was directly related to teachers' trust of the principal. "Principals who are friendly, open, and collegial with teachers command respect" (p. 305).

Sergiovanni (1995) wrote the various aspects of leadership can be described metaphorically as a set of forces. One of the forces he described was the influence of leadership found in "harnessing the school's social and interpersonal potential – its human resources" (p. 84). By employing this force, Sergiovanni believed "principals provide support, encouragement, and growth opportunities for teachers and others" (p. 85). Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) further elaborated on principals who provided individualized support to their staff by saying these principals respected their followers and were concerned about their followers' personal feelings and needs (p. 72).

Lambert (1998) believed all learning must exist in a trusting environment where relationships formed a safety net of support and positive challenge. School staffs must "provide long-term support for one another, challenging one another to improve and to question our current perceptions and to learn together" (p. 8). I believe the type of relationships Lambert referred to, ones with safety nets and positive challenges, were evident in the stories I heard at Meadowview School.

Researchers such as Deal (1987), Sergiovanni (1995), Leithwood et al. (1999), and Lambert (1998) recognized the influence support played in relationships on the school landscape. Each of the eight stories I selected from the participants' narrative accounts, also focused on the area of support and supportive relationships. However, to say "support" was the major melody in the greatest influence stories, without examining the harmony patterns, would minimize the importance of the different types of support given in principal-teacher relationships.

Eight "support" harmony patterns from the stories of influence were selected. These were, by no means, the only types of support given to my participants during their teaching careers. They were, however, the harmony patterns which, I believed, created the greatest influences for these four people. The first seven harmony patterns selected were patterns played in stories for each participant. Confidence and affirmation are listed as the first two harmony patterns as they were the patterns most often mentioned by the four participants. The next most commonly mentioned harmony patterns were active involvement, promoting professional growth and engaging in reflective practice. They

are listed next as I believed they actively promote improved classroom practice. Providing a listening ear and sense of humour are the sixth and seventh harmony patterns which relate to the personal skills needed to extend the relationship built by the previously mentioned five patterns. The eighth and final harmony pattern involves dissonance or discord[1], in other words, the lack of a supportive relationship. It was chosen as the final pattern as three participants shared stories related to lack of support. From listening to their stories, I believed, this final harmony pattern, in and of itself, created a negative influence that was long lasting and one of the most influential in the shaping of a teacher's professional identity.

Harmony Pattern # 1: Demonstrating Confidence in Practice

All of the participants in my study spoke about the importance of principals having confidence in their professional practices. From their stories, I believed this confidence was having faith in a person and helped to lead to the building of a supportive relationship. Confidence, according to the Oxford Dictionary (2000), was "a firm trust; feeling of certainty or self-reliance" (p. 167).

When I reflected on my stories where principals and superintendents demonstrated their confidence in me, no story stood out stronger than my earlier story of David. The support and confidence he displayed when he encouraged me to return to university to work on

1. Discord, according to the Oxford Dictionary (2000), means a combination of musical notes producing a harsh or unpleasant sound.

my master's degree and subsequently to continue in the doctoral program have had a lasting influence on my professional practice. My experience while taking my undergraduate degree had not been positive and I lacked the confidence in myself to go back to university and continue my formal learning. His faith and belief in me, that I could go back and achieve my master's degree, motivated me to take a five-year learning leap that, without him, I doubt I would have taken.

Joanne shared a story about her principal in Fort Simpson who was open to looking at developing a program for children with behaviour problems in order to accommodate the needs of these students. She told me about meeting with her principal and telling him she was willing to try teaching the program. Her principal told her to do what she could with the class and he would give her all the support she needed. He knew she could deal with the challenge and he further encouraged her by telling her he would work along with her throughout her journey, giving her support and encouragement. He also demonstrated his support by being willing to fill in for her whenever she called on him. She told me how he was there whenever she needed him and he helped to show her she was a strong teacher in her classroom. Her principal also demonstrated his confidence in Joyce by supporting her plan to take her young student, Jason, home to New Brunswick for the summer. He continued to show his confidence in her abilities by advocating for her with social services and Jason's family.

Joanne's story of her Fort Simpson principal was not the only story she shared where a principal demonstrated confidence in her ability. She spoke about her Moncton

principal's confidence in her teaching abilities when she was asked to teach in the church basement. Her principal believed she was capable of teaching in settings without the need for direct supervision.

Like Joanne, Penny, Laurie and Cherie also shared stories of how their principals demonstrated confidence, which helped to build support. For example, Penny told us a story of Keith, her first principal at Meadowview, who demonstrated his confidence in her by giving her a unique teaching opportunity. After watching Penny teach for approximately six months, he offered her the chance to move with her grade one students through grades two and three. When Penny shared her story, she said she believed he was impressed with her work and confident she was someone who was not afraid to take on new challenges. Laurie spoke of Boss' confidence in her ability to run the home economics program. He asked her if she was interested in starting a foods program and allowed her to plan the new home economics lab, supporting her input by telling her if she wanted anything for the lab, she should have it. And finally, Cherie shared her story of how her first principal told her to be herself and he demonstrated he had the confidence in her by letting her do exactly that.

All of the participants shared with me how they like to hear about the confidence principals had in their professional practice. As a result of this confidence, they talked about their willingness to risk trying new things on their professional landscapes.

In his master's thesis, Cole (1990) found three themes related to principals influencing teacher relationships. Two of these themes related to principals having confidence in their teachers to do the best job possible. He said teachers perceived their relationship with their principals were positively influenced when the principals (a) were supportive of teachers without interfering (p. 70) and (b) demonstrated trust in the teachers as professionals "capable of making decisions in the best interest of students" (p. 74).

Short and Greer (1997) discussed how teachers' confidence in their skills and abilities developed when they believed the principal demonstrated through his/her actions the teachers were competent and had the skills necessary to achieve the school's goals (p. 138). Blase and Kirby (2000) examined the area of confidence in their in-depth study of 836 teachers who shared the everyday strategies that open and effective principals used to influence, motivate, and empower teachers. One of the strategies used was autonomy, having the confidence to give teachers freedom in determining curriculum and instructional decisions, particularly at the classroom level (p. 60). More specifically, they found that principals:

> encourage teacher autonomy by using strategies such as demonstrating trust, developing shared decision-making structures, encouraging innovation and risk taking, soliciting teachers' input, and buffering instructional time from interruptions (p. 62).

I believed demonstrating confidence in teachers' abilities to do "what's best for students" was an integral harmony pattern evident in the stories of principals shared with me. I feel it was through the principal's display of confidence that the next harmony pattern results, the affirmation of practice.

Harmony Pattern #2: Affirmation of Practice

According to Webster's New World Thesaurus (1999), affirmation was receiving "approval" or "support" (p. 19). During my years in teaching, I often relied on the affirmation of others to help validate my practices in both positive and negative situations. Affirmation of my practice was never more important than in my last assignment where I dealt with an air quality issue at my school, which took approximately ten months to resolve. Over this period of time, I locked horns with several influential district personnel and found myself displaying several forms of unflattering (and unladylike) behaviour. At the apex of this battle, for indeed it was a battle, I approached David, once again, for his support. His affirmation of my actions was probably the only thing that held me together during this heated and often contested struggle. When the issue finally appeared to be resolved, David sent me an e-mail, thanking me for my perseverance in doing what I thought was best for my students and staff.

Penny talked about how much she valued Elaine's support throughout the situation with a student called Walter. Penny had, on numerous occasions, dealt with Walter's inappropriate behavior and when Walter crossed the line of what was acceptable behavior, Penny responded in a manner which she later questioned. Elaine's affirmation that Penny's actions were appropriate for the situation enabled Penny to have confidence in her actions when discussing the situation with the superintendent. Penny believed Ellen affirmed she had done the best she could in that particular situation.

Like Penny, Joanne talked about how her Moncton principal would affirm her practice through praise and encouragement. He also affirmed her practices when problems with parents arose. She told me he backed her one hundred per cent. Her Fort Simpson principal also affirmed her practice as he frequently told her how impressed he was with what was going on in her classroom with students who had behavioural challenges.

Laurie shared with me how much she valued her principal's support when dealing with a parent who Penny knew on a personal basis. From personal past experience, I have found knowing parents on a personal basis can sometimes lead to difficulties when a parent-teacher conflict arises. Laurie spoke about Penny's professional approach to her situation and how she felt Penny was on her side affirming Laurie's actions in this situation. Finally, Cherie spoke of her first principal who gave her positive feedback when he popped his head into her room. Cherie felt her professional practices were affirmed and she developed a greater confidence in her skills. He further affirmed her practice through his nomination of her for a first year teaching award. Laurie, Joanne and Cherie spoke of the importance Penny's written notes had for each of them. They believed these notes affirmed their contributions to the school community through their professional practices.

Ubben et al. (2001) found effective organizations celebrate success. They said good leaders consistently and continually used every method available to call attention to their staff's excellent work and great accomplishments (p. 39). Blase and Kirby (2000) found teachers most frequently reported principals' praise, related to professional practice, as a key strategy that affirmed teachers' efforts. The teachers who responded to Blase and

Kirby's questionnaire cited praise as one of the most effective strategies used to influence their work, a strategy that has only recently appeared in descriptions of effective school leadership (pp. 11-12). As an influence strategy, affirmation was most often given to individual teachers, commending them for their professional practices in the classrooms. By recognizing the individual teachers' strengths, principals facilitated the development of "teachers' skills while promoting teachers' confidence and satisfaction" (p. 13). Blase and Kirby also found the use of praise increased teachers' sense of belonging as respected and important members of the school team (p. 13). As a result, praise also influenced teachers' support for their principals (p. 14).

Blase and Kirby (2000) concluded principals needed to capitalize on every available opportunity to affirm teachers' practices, individually or in groups, with brief but sincere remarks and gestures (p. 17). Affirmation of teaching practice was a powerful influence strategy even when it was not communicated directly to teachers. The teachers, in the study, reported remarks principals made to others also informed them of how their principals felt about their work (p. 19). Blase and Kirby also noted variety and frequency of affirming teachers' professional practice was as critical as the techniques used (e.g. notes, remarks to others, public announcements, pats on the back) (p. 19).

In earlier research, Neis (1994) and Cole (1990) each examined principal-teacher relationships. Neis found all of his eight participants spoke of affirmation by principals as being a critical component in showing support for their efforts as teachers (p. 73). Cole found the appreciation and affirmation of staff efforts influenced teachers' relationship with the principal (p. 28). "Sincere comments made every person on staff

feel that they were worthwhile and that he (the principal) appreciated what they were doing" (p. 30).

Blase and Blase (1998a) found that different types of affirmation of teachers' practice "... given by principals in informal interactions with teachers ... send a valuable and powerful message" (p. 121). Blase and Blase (1999b) also discovered principals who affirmed specific and concrete teaching behaviors greatly influenced "teacher motivation, self-esteem, and efficacy. This specific feedback also fostered teacher reflective behavior, including reinforcement of effective teaching strategies, risk taking, and innovation/creativity" (p. 363).

I recognized affirmation of teachers' professional practice by principals was an influential harmony pattern in the narrative accounts of Cherie, Penny, Laurie and Joanne. In my experience, I found affirmation was usually a result of observing teachers in action, either in the classroom or through committee efforts. I believed being actively involved with teachers better enabled me to affirm their practice on a more genuine basis. As a result, active involvement was the next harmony pattern discussed.

Harmony Pattern # 3: Active Involvement

One of the many tasks normally assigned to assistant principals was the timetable scheduling. Nowadays, this may not be such an ominous task but in my day, the day of the chip boards, it was mind numbing. Each subject had its own colour. As grades eights and nines had some options together, the chips crossed grade levels and the board looked

like a painter's splattered dropcloth. Prior to working with Shawna, I had not worked with a chip board and I found the task overwhelming. However, Shawna was not about to leave me alone with this daunting task and she helped me work through the process.

The chip board hung on the wall in her office and we spent many hours staring mindlessly at it. One of us would rock back in Shawna's chair while the other person would lie down on her couch gazing at the board from a different angle. When one of us would see a move, she or I would jump up and run to the board. The other person would move to the board quickly as well to see this great problem-solving in action. Once the chips were moved and the inevitable domino effect occurred, we would move back to the chair and the couch, often switching places, waiting for the next wave of inspiration to hit us. This process would last for days before the students arrived at the beginning of the school year. I believed Shawna and I developed an incredibly strong bond by working together at that old chip board, a bond that reaffirmed for me, we were part of a team, a family.

Cherie spoke of Penny's active involvement in the mentorship program the school district set up. She told me they had regularly scheduled meetings where they would sit down and discuss some of the student and teacher issues Penny was dealing with. Penny involved Cherie in some teacher supervision activities and together they worked through the budget and other administrative duties such as bus supervision after school. Penny also asked for Cherie's assistance when dealing with certain student problems. Through all of these activities, Penny provided Cherie with the support and guidance that allowed her to become more aware of various foci involved in the day to day running of a school.

Joanne talked about her principal's active involvement in her class of students with behavioural challenges in Fort Simpson. She shared with me how she believed his active involvement when dealing with these students was crucial to the success of her program. She also mentioned her principal in Frobisher Bay, who became involved in the situation with the student who spilled ink on the materials in her desk. He found a solution to the problem by transferring the student to another class while continuing to provide Joanne support for her program.

Laurie talked at great lengths about Boss' active involvement in her home economics program. He attended the fashion shows, often being the only male in attendance. She also spoke of Penny's active involvement in her year-end science field trip and how Laurie believed Penny's presence positively influenced the behavior of her students. Penny spoke of working together with Elaine and how she and Elaine often discussed issues with Elaine presenting another point of view to be examined in their discussions. Because of the trusting relationship they developed through their efforts as a team, Penny believed she was able to risk sharing both personal and professional matters with Elaine.

Cole (1990) found all of his participants emphasized the importance of principals knowing what was going on in their schools and in individual classrooms (p. 19). By being visible, these teachers believed the principal was able to express authentic "concern and caring about the students and the staff" (p. 20). Cole also discovered staff members valued having principals who were seen as both colleagues and administrators (p. 59).

Reitzug (1997) supported Cole's findings as his research indicated highly successful schools had principals who were "active participants in collegial work" (pp. 338-339). Short and Greer (1997) also wrote about the active involvement of principals. They found these principals were:

> right down there in the trenches working along with everyone else...never afraid of "getting their hands dirty." They would do everything anyone else did and then go even further. These were principals that, through personal behavior and example, inspired trust from all. They trusted others and earned reciprocal trust. (p. 53)

In his research, Maeroff (1993) discovered the trust developed as a result of active involvement created a bond between teachers and principals (p. 83). This bond sometimes led to a mentoring relationship which Lambert (Lambert et al., 1995) wrote, could initially be uneven but was inspired through a "caring investment in the growth of each other" (p. 88) as in the case of Cherie and Penny.

King and Kercher (1991) found principals led best by developing the strengths of others. Blase and Blase (1997) confirmed King and Kercher's findings as they found effective principals worked with "others as equals, to be one among equals, and to place the vision and power of the group far above their personal needs and goals" (p. xiii). Blase and Kirby (2000) discovered teachers valued staff participation in decision-making as the second most effective influence strategy after affirmation of practice (p. 43). Teachers also developed a "whole-school perspective" or the ability to "see the big picture" as a result of their increased involvement (p. 47).

Research regarding active involvement also included principal support when dealing with situations similar to the parental one mentioned by Laurie. Cole (1990) found teachers valued principal support when dealing with confrontational situation with parents and students (p. 59). Blase and Kirby (2000) confirmed Cole's findings by saying principal support for "teacher decisions regarding student misbehavior to be a powerful influence over teacher behaviors and attitudes" (p. 72). The teachers in their study believed when principals recognized this type of support, it "increase[d] teachers' confidence, which, in turn, increase[d] their effectiveness in classroom management" (p. 72). They also discovered principals, who were actively involved and had developed trusting relationships, encouraged teachers to explore alternative instructional and classroom management strategies (p. 86).

Through the harmony pattern of active involvement, Joanne, Cherie, Laurie and Penny knew their principals were aware of their professional practices. This awareness influenced these teachers towards continuous learning. As Joanne found, providing the support and encouragement to investigate new classroom practices often resulted in harmony pattern #4: promoting professional growth.

Harmony Pattern # 4: Promoting Professional Growth

As a principal, I have had many experiences that influenced my professional practice. My associate superintendents and superintendents strongly believed in the importance of professional growth through professional development activities. These activities helped to shape my philosophy of education as well as provided me with strategies to improve

my practice. David's encouragement, to take both my master's and doctoral programs, enabled me to discover literature and research that shaped my identity as a principal. Works by Daresh (2001), Blase and Blase (1997, 1998a, 1999a, 1999b), Lambert (1998) and Zepeda (1999) were now an integral part of my professional practice.

During our conversations, Cherie told me each of her principals encouraged and facilitated professional development activities. She spoke of Keith who facilitated an opportunity for her to visit another school in another town to learn more about grade one programs. Penny encouraged her to participate in several professional development opportunities such as Reading Recovery, the mentorship program and Educational Leadership Academy, all of which Cherie believed influenced her professional practice.

Laurie spoke about her participation in many professional growth activities including her return to university to get her teaching degree and later a graduate diploma in language arts. As a result of her participation in professional activities such as the sewing workshops and applying her new knowledge in the classroom, her students were able to create incredible projects such as Eskimo parkas. Laurie shared with me how she and her students received public recognition for their work in her home economics program as a result of her professional development.

Joanne shared her stories of professional growth and principal support throughout her career. She learned from colleagues when she was teaching on local license in New Brunswick and she learned from the variety of new teaching experiences she had in

various parts of the world: Frobisher Bay, Fort Simpson, Australia, Meadowview and Norman Wells working with her husband. In all of these situations, her principals encouraged the development of her professional skills. Joanne was actively involved in her professional growth and also returned to university to complete her education degree later on in her career.

Penny also spoke about going back to university for her master's degree. She shared how the impact of taking courses and participating in professional dialogue influenced her practice. She believed returning to university provided her with an opportunity to better define her beliefs and shape her professional identity.

Extensive research has been done on the effectiveness of promoting and supporting professional growth. In his study of 624 teachers, Sheppard (1996) found teachers believed promoting professional development was the most influential of all principal behaviors (p. 325). Cole (1990) also learned his participants appreciated their principals' belief that teachers "are in a constant state of growth" and need support to facilitate their need for professional development (p. 61). Cole's finding was also supported by Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993). Blase and Kirby (2000) suggested effective principals created formal and informal opportunities for professional growth through staff development and the distribution of current professional literature. They believed staff development included the acknowledgement that "colleagues, as well as external experts, possess useful information" (p. 89) and should be utilized for professional growth. They went on to say:

> This awareness fosters collaboration, which in turn fosters a desire for further growth. Thus, the principal who promotes faculty growth and involvement will provide resources and opportunities for development. (p. 89)

In earlier work, Blase and Blase (1999b) found effective principals addressed emergent instructional needs through organized staff development opportunities. These opportunities:

> along with teacher input, discretion in attending, and support for innovation, resulted in effects on reflective behavior, innovation/creativity, variety in teaching, risk taking, positive responses to student diversity, and instructional focus, as well as effects on motivation, efficacy, and self-esteem. (p. 364)

Blase and Blase (1998a) found effective principals supported formal collaborative groups among teachers, through the use of inter- and intra-departmental and grade-level structures, working together regularly on instructional issues. These principals also encouraged intervisitations between teachers within the school and in other schools to observe classrooms and programs (p. 365). I believed both of these practices were evident at Meadowview and promoted professional growth. Penny talked about the grade level meetings structured to promote dialogue and facilitate planning with grade level partners. I also saw teachers provide additional classroom assistance in their partner's classrooms as part of the resource program at Meadowview. Cherie, Laurie and Penny had opportunities to travel to other schools for observation and program development.

Blase and Blase (1999b) found principals who support diverse approaches to teaching and learning enhance teachers' development and reflective practice. These principals provided essential resources to support program redesign which resulted in "increased motivation, efficacy, and reflective behavior, including greater variety in classroom instruction, increases in risk taking, and increases in planning/preparation" (pp. 365-366). Blase and Kirby (2000) discovered teachers felt the dissemination of professional literature, such as articles from research and professional journals, magazines and newspapers, also influenced their classroom practices (p. 90). In addition, they believed principals, as promoters of teacher development, must be learners themselves. Principals needed to be avid readers of professional literature, looking for new methods of improvements. As well as, Blase and Kirby encouraged principals to participate in professional development seminars with their teachers as seminars often provided teachers with new approaches for classroom management and demonstrated new teaching strategies (p. 111).

Blase and Blase (1999a) found effective principals believed teachers were willing to examine their work critically to improve and embrace the challenges of professional development. However, these principals understood professional development could be a difficult journey, one "that require[d] courage, risk taking, and even some failure along the way" (p. 18). By allowing them to make choices from among alternatives, Blase and Kirby (2000) noted teachers believed they became more reflective about their practice (p. 86). Professional development activities encouraged Laurie and Cherie to look at new career paths, for Laurie a move into elementary school and for Cherie a possible move

into leadership. By dialoguing with colleagues, Joanne found professional growth strategies for planning to accommodate a variety of student needs. Penny shared how professional development activities allowed her to introduce new programs into the school such as Reading Recovery. As well, a return to university for a master's degree in administration helped Penny define her professional beliefs. I believed the harmony pattern of encouraging professional growth promoted not only an exploration of new ways of thinking and teaching for my participants but also promoted a close examination and reflection of past practices, the next harmony pattern.

Harmony Pattern #5: Engaging in Reflective Practice

As a principal, I experienced many occasions where my decisions or practices have been questioned or challenged by parents, teachers and students. I experienced one of my most memorable experiences within a week of starting my first principal assignment. As a member of the administration team, Shawna taught me about the importance of principals knowing what was going on in classrooms through formal observations and informal drop-in visits. As teacher evaluations had been mandated for three years, I assumed teachers were already involved in these kinds of observations. When I announced to the staff I would be making formal and informal visits on a fairly frequent basis, I was greeted with a silence I perceived as "So what else is new?" I assumed the meaning of their silence incorrectly and was informed by my acting designate, shortly after my announcement, I would be "lynched" at the next staff meeting. That early experience in the principalship strengthened my previous learnings from my story of Sam and further

shaped my practices by reminding me to be more cautious, inquiring and reflective when making decisions that affected staff and students.

My reinforced cautious, inquiring and reflective practice was put to the test several months later. One afternoon, Gregory, a grade six student, was sent down to the office for disrupting the class. Although by no means a "behavior problem," I knew Gregory fairly well as he and I had had several confrontations in the past when he challenged adult authority in the school. As he entered my office, I glanced up and looked at his face, witnessing the most controlled rage I had ever seen in my life. I asked Gregory to take a seat and told him I would be right with him as soon as I finished the task I was working on. It really was not that I had to finish the task, I just felt I needed to give him some cool-down time. After waiting for several minutes, I asked him if he wanted to "talk about it." He looked me straight in the eye and told me in no uncertain terms what he thought of me as a principal. The words "f__'ing b____" were part of his description. Although momentarily stunned by the vehemence of his anger, I quickly retorted that, "Yes, I was and I worked darn hard to be a good one." My response shocked him and he sat in the desk with his mouth wide open. I realized I needed a few moments to collect my thoughts so I left my office to take a stroll. After questioning the appropriateness of my response and all the money I obviously wasted taking psychology course, I began to wonder what exactly happened to create this anger. Although I normally wait to speak with teachers at the first natural break, I walked down to his teacher's class to seek further information. When I spoke with Gregory's teacher, he told me, after he sent Gregory out of the classroom, one of the students confided in him that a close family friend had

sexually assaulted Gregory's sister the night before. The emotional trauma to the family, as a result of this situation, caused Gregory to be awake all night. As I walked back down to my office, I remembered the devastation sexual assault caused in the families I worked with during my fourteen years as a counsellor at the Sexual Assault Centre. I knew school was normally a safe haven for Gregory but as I continued towards my office, I detoured around to the general office to get his home telephone number. I called Gregory's mother and explained I understood there had been a traumatic incident at home the previous evening. I went on to tell her I did not need or want any of the details, but that I thought Gregory was having a rough time at school and, if it was okay with her, I would like to send Gregory home to be with her. I made certain she knew this was not a disciplinary action but rather a result of my belief Gregory needed to be with her at this time. She consented and I went back into my office to share this information with Gregory. Although we never discussed his outburst, I sensed from his actions after that day, that he made a concerted effort to be more compliant with school expectations. As I reflected on this story some fourteen years later, I believed I made a difference that day with Gregory because I took the time to reflect on his past behaviour rather than simply following the discipline policy and suspending him.

Penny spoke about the influence Vicki had on shaping her practice as a reflective practitioner. She told me how she learned to look for that "grain of truth" in the questions and challenges Vicki, and subsequently other staff, raised. Upon reflecting on Vicki's suggestions, she found Vicki's input had a positive influence on how the staff looked at report card development as well as the organization of science bins. Penny also spoke

about Cherie's influence on her practice. She reflected on Cherie's positive interactions with parents and students and recognized Cherie helped to shape her interactions with people as well. Penny also found working with Cherie and John, in the district leadership mentorship program, influenced her practice. Through dialogue and discussion in a safe environment, Cherie's and John's probing questions enabled her to reflect on her actions and decisions by clarifying her decisions with people she trusted.

Cherie shared with me how attending the Educational Leadership Academy made her reflect on her teaching philosophies. She said attending the conference gave her clarity as to why people move into leadership positions. Current leadership personnel openly shared with her their reasons as to why they chose school administration as a career path. She discovered each individual made this decision personally and she realized she would have to make her own decision as to whether or not she would move into the field of leadership.

Joanne spoke about how Penny's notes, rich in details, not only affirmed her professional practice but also caused her to reflect on her practices. This reflection encouraged her towards continuous growth. She shared with me how important it was for her to be looking at new practices within her school landscape. The influence of being a reflective practitioner was never more poignant for me than when Laurie spoke about the effects her transfer from high school to junior high had on her. She was able to reflect back on the incident and talk about how, initially, she viewed the transfer as devastating and how, now, she believed the transfer did her a lot of good. Laurie said the incident had shaken up her professional beliefs and, upon reflection, it resulted in her making positive changes

in her professional and personal life that she believed would not have occurred had this incident not happened.

Blase and Kirby (2000) found every school and every teacher offered a unique set of dynamics for principals when framing and solving problems in the context of school. They believed when principals were making judgments, principals needed to use reflection-in-action that dealt with the political, social, and interpersonal aspects of the situation. Once an action had been taken, Blase and Kirby felt it was necessary for principals to further reflect on the action and its consequences (p.122). Houston (1988) (1988) defined reflection as "deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement" (p. 40). According to Schön (1983) (cited in Lambert et al., 1995), the key to growth and development was the:

> ability to reflect on one's learning, to adapt behaviors based on that reflection, and to develop a theoretical workframe, or set of understandings that takes into account one's experiences. (p. 22)

Schön (1984) (cited in Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 44) described reflection-in-action as involving "on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, re-structuring and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomenon; often, [taking] the form of a reflective conversation with the situation." According to Lambert (1998), reflection was central to understanding and making meaning of one's practice.

McBride and Skau (1995) noted, "The process of reflection, undertaken in an environment based on trust and seeking the empowerment of participants, constitutes a

powerful potential for improved ... practice" (p. 277). Lambert (1998) wrote reflection can be done in a variety of ways: "reflections on beliefs, assumptions, and past practice; reflection in action, in practice; collective reflection during dialogue and in coaching relationships" (p. 22). However done, Lambert believed it was crucial to make reflection an integral part of professional practice.

Blase and Blase (1998a) found principals valued dialogue as a strategy to encourage teachers "to become aware of and critically reflect on their learning and professional practice." They discussed five talking strategies used with teachers to promote reflection: "(a) making suggestions, (b) giving feedback, (c) modeling, (d) using inquiry and soliciting advice and opinions, and (e) giving praise" (p. 359). As a result of this dialogue, Blase and Blase (1998a) found teachers' reflective behaviours included:

> implementing new ideas, using greater variety in teaching, responding to student diversity, preparing and planning more carefully, taking more risks, achieving better instructional focus, and using professional discretion to make changes. (p. 359)

Seyfarth (1999), like Blase and Blase (1998a), found principals facilitated reflective practices in many ways. However, he believed the focus should be on "stimulating conversations among teachers about classroom experiences" (p. 262). He discovered this reflective dialogue increased teachers' awareness of the quality and impact of their teaching and created opportunities for professional growth. In reflective inquiry, he concluded the principal needed to facilitate the process of personal exploration for teachers. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) believed reflective practice thrived in an environment where people were invited to speak freely about their ideas and concerns.

When actively engaged in reflective dialogue, Lambert et al. (1995) believed teachers broadened their thinking about the world, better understood diverse perspectives, and became more flexible and open to new experiences (p. 28). Zimmerman (Lambert et al., 1995) reminded us of the importance of the reflective pause in reflective practice. She said "it is the pauses in our speech that give it its cadence and the shape. The pauses give us fractions of seconds to think about what we are saying" (p. 113).

Lambert (1998) believed teachers were the key to change on the school landscape and their efforts as supporters and initiators of improvement were critical. She wrote "The principals' role as supportive and promoter of interactive professionalism is essential" (p. 84). Blase and Blase (1998) supported Lambert's belief and found teachers valued principals' reflective suggestions when made through:

> (a) listening, (b) sharing their experiences, (c) using examples and demonstrations, (d) giving teachers a choice, (e) contradicting outdated or destructive policies, (f) encouraging risk taking, (g) offering professional literature, (h) recognizing teachers' strengths, and (i) maintaining a focus on improving instruction. (p. 360)

In the harmony pattern of reflective practice, using dialogue plays an important part in shaping one's professional identity as illustrated in my four participants' stories. Penny and Cherie shared how the conversations they had, as part of the mentorship program, enabled them to reflect on their practices together. Laurie talked about the importance of her conversations with Boss when she was planning a new home economics lab. Joanne talked about the conversations she had with her principal in Frobisher Bay and how she valued being able to discuss the difficulties she was experiencing with one of her students

in an open and frank way. I believed the first step of reflective dialogue in influencing professional practice was listening to the stories being told. Listening was the sixth harmony pattern found in my participants' stories.

Harmony Pattern # 6: Offering a Listening Ear

As a teacher and as a principal, I always appreciated being able to turn to a more experienced colleague to provide me with a listening ear and sound advice. Grace has been my listening ear for twenty-four years now. Shawna and David were also available whenever I reached out to them. These three people have been influential in shaping both my personal and professional practice.

One particularly strong memory comes to mind when I think of how David provided me with a listening ear. About five years ago, I was in a ten-week professional development course on teacher supervision. Our instructor put together a daylong seminar where professionals from the Alberta Teachers Association, Alberta Education and a former and current superintendent spoke to us about their beliefs on this topic. David happened to be the fourth speaker to speak that day.

At the beginning of the morning, the seminar leader asked us to use name cards throughout the day and I glibly asked if I had to use my real name. He did not respond to me, so I wrote out the name "Suzy" on my name card and placed it in front of me. The morning presentation did not start off well. The speaker, a representative from the Alberta Teachers Association, spoke about the support they offer to teachers who were

experiencing difficulty with their principals. He then went on to criticize the district I worked in as well as one of my colleagues who, unbeknownst to the A.T.A. representative, happened to be sitting in the seminar room. After listening to him and stewing for about twenty minutes over what he was saying, I left the room and went for an early coffee break. I returned prior to the next presentation and noticed that my name card had been turned around and my correct name written on it. I got the hint. The rest of the day continued with two more mind-numbing presentations. David arrived just before the afternoon break. As we broke for coffee, I turned to Anne, an administrator from another district, who was sitting beside me and said, "Watch this." As she looked over, I turned my name card back around to "Suzy" and told her David would get a kick out of my "new" name.

After the break, David asked us to write out five of our beliefs about education and told us to be prepared to share them. After we wrote, we shared our beliefs with a partner and identified the one belief we felt strongest about. Calling us back into the large group, David asked a teacher from a different district to share her belief. Through gentle, sincere probing, David encouraged the teacher to elaborate on her belief statement. The next teacher he called on was from our district and he started to take on a less formal tone. Finally, he turned to me, smiled, and said, "Well, Suzy. What do you think?" to which I gave my response. He challenged me on my belief and we began to banter back and forth, a practice we had engaged in since our first meeting.

After David left the seminar, the instructor began to debrief the day. Most of his comments were supportive in nature until he came to David. The instructor then criticized our school district and then turned to me and announced that if I had been better prepared, David would not have picked on me. I tried to explain to him that I was not being picked on, that the bantering was part of our relationship and that I was fine with David's and my discussion. I explained how I did not appreciate his comments about my district. I can not remember what I said exactly, all I remember was the audible gasp in the room. After the instructor left, several colleagues urged me to be very careful when making any further comments.

I went home and replayed my conversation with my instructor over and over again for the rest of the weekend. By the time I got to school on Monday, I was still as angry as I had been two days before. Knowing how much David enjoyed a good laugh, I wrote him an e-mail explaining what had happened after he left and how I had stewed all weekend. I concluded my e-mail by telling him that:

> *...if the instructor takes another verbal swing at me or the district, I'm going to get my cousin Sean O'Feisty, of the IRA, and that ain't no International Reading Association, to share my thoughts on higher education with the instructor. I'm going to go outside to play with the kids now 'cuz I know they like me for who I am! (E-mail, May 17, 1998)*

Later that afternoon, I arrived late at a meeting David scheduled with thirty school principals. I found out after the meeting that he read my e-mail and asked several of my colleagues, who attended the seminar, to elaborate what had happened for him. The next day, I was called out of the kindergarten room where I was teaching to take a telephone call from David. When I got on the phone, he asked me how I was and if I had any

concerns regarding the rest of my course. I said I did not think so but I was not too sure. He told me not to hesitate to call if I did and he would be there for me, elaborating on what action he would take. Although I sent the e-mail to enlighten him about yet another situation I had gotten myself into, I was touched that he listened to my inner message and called to provide me with support.

Joanne shared with me how she valued Penny's support as she was going through her divorce. She felt comfortable asking Penny questions about how she should proceed and valued Penny's informal "big sister" approach of keeping an eye on her while she was at school. Like Joanne, Laurie talked about Boss' support particularly when she was transferred to the junior high school. She told me how he was one of the friendly people who comforted her during this traumatic time in her life.

Penny shared her experiences over the past nine years with Elaine. She found Elaine provided an "ear" when she needed someone to talk to. She respected Elaine and knew Elaine really cared about her. I believed part of the relationship and bond between Penny and Elaine was the trust and respect they had for each other. Penny talked about the situation that occurred last year between a student and herself and having been in a similar situation, I could hear the intensity in Penny's voice as she talked about the importance of having Elaine there to listen to her and provide her with the support she needed. Cherie discovered the principals at the Educational Leadership Academy all believed in the importance of having a support group of colleagues to call on, to listen to you and provide you with support when the need arose.

Cole (1990) found teachers perceived principals as influencing their relationship through the development of two-way communication. Further, the principal must be approachable and "be genuine in listening to staff" who had concerns and ideas, and to "consider what teachers had to say, and take suggestions seriously" (p. 72). Lambert (1998) believed frequent conversation and dialogue, while sharing the work and responsibilities of school, fostered these relationships. She found that "as individuals interact with one another, they tend to listen across boundaries – boundaries erected by disciplines, grade levels, expertise, authority, position, race and gender" (p. 79). Blase and Blase (1997) supported these findings. They discussed how principals established openness "by listening, by actively encouraging input and feedback (including criticism of self and programs) and making themselves available for interaction and discussion" (p. 38).

The act of providing a listening ear can influence people in many ways. For Penny, Elaine provided a listening ear regarding a student behaviour issue and the resulting allegations. For Laurie, Boss provided support by listening to her at a time when her professional beliefs were shaken. For Joanne, the relationship she established with Penny allowed her share the personal trauma and questions that come with divorce. For Cherie, the principals at the Educational Leadership Academy listened to her questions and wonderings as she pondered the possibility of a future career move.

Sometimes, when principals listened to the conversations and dialogues of their staff, they sensed a certain anxiety on the teacher's part. When appropriate, humour, the next harmony pattern, can help to alleviate these tensions.

Harmony Pattern #7: Using a Sense of Humour

I believed humour played an important part in the life of school particularly for staff members who utilized humour as a means to cope. Humour has greatly shaped my professional identity. Earlier in my dissertation, I shared stories about Shawna's sense of humour and how she taught me that humour could be useful in times of stress.

I remember how one of my associate superintendents frequently used humour as an icebreaker to start his meetings. Due to my claustrophobic nature, it was my habit to always sit at the back of the meeting room so I could leave without interrupting others, if the need arose. After having a particularly stressful week, I arrived at my associate's meeting a wee bit late only to be directed by his secretary to a table near the front of the room. At first I hesitated as I looked around and saw several available seats near the back. The secretary repeated her request that I take the seat near the front. As I started to approach my assigned table, everyone turned and grinned at me. When I arrived at my designated spot, I looked down at the table and saw a happy face made out of Nanaimo bars smiling up at me. My associate, knowing my passion for chocolate and being well aware of several recent incidents at my school, decided to use his meeting as a way to brighten my day with a laugh.

For Laurie, Boss had many influences on her professional practice, but perhaps, most of all, was his sense of humour. She talked at great length about her fond memories of him. I remembered how she laughed as she recalled what a tease Boss was and the twinkle he had in his eyes as he used humour as a way of expressing his support. In particular, Boss's sense of humour was shared in Laurie's story of how he placed Eno on the staffroom tables as she hosted her multicultural luncheon for staff members. Laurie told me she appreciated having a principal who had a sense of humour most of all. Like Laurie, Joanne shared a story of how her first principal from Moncton called her on the telephone on the evening of an important hockey game and played a practical joke on her, knowing she would sacrifice attending the game in order to prepare for her visitor the next morning. Joanne said this incident showed her a human side to principals she had not seen before.

Penny talked about Elaine's use of humour when discussing personal and professional concerns. When talking about her own children, Penny expressed concern about a choice one of her daughters had made. Elaine reminded Penny that that was what kids do, one week it is one child, the next week it is the other. Cherie found several of her principals had an "off the wall" sense of humour when she asked the Educational Leadership Academy principals why they liked their job. Responses such as "the best parking spot" and "the big bucks" illustrated for her that humour was an important part of interacting with colleagues on her professional landscape.

Covey (1989) explained one of the characteristics of principle-centered leaders was that they "have a healthy sense of humor, particularly laughing at themselves and not at others' expense" (p. 36). In his research, Cole (1990) discovered his participants viewed sense of humour as an important principal quality. His findings were further supported by Foster (1998) who wrote "humor seemed to be an important part of the human interactions both inside and outside the classrooms" (p. 91).

Just as listening provided support to my participants and influenced them in different ways, so too did the harmony pattern of humour. For Penny, Elaine provided a humourous look at raising children. For Joanne, humour enabled her to see her Moncton principal through another lens. For Laurie, Boss' teasing sense of humour validated her efforts within her home economics program and Cherie found the sense of humour principals at the Leadership Academy used as one where they were able to see the lighter side of their professional responsibilities.

The harmony patterns of principal confidence, affirmation, active involvement, promoting professional growth, promoting reflection, providing a listening ear and a sense of humour were viewed by all my participants as influencing and shaping their practice. However, three of the participants shared stories of their experiences when principals had not provided support when it was needed. Their harmony pattern, lack of support, was the final pattern in this musical selection.

Harmony Pattern #8: Lack of Support Effects Professional Practice and Identity

I believed everyone in the teaching profession has a story they could tell where they felt their principal had not supported them at some point in their professional practice. I thought it was only human nature for this to occur. However, it was not until I started to write about my participants' stories that I realized I, too, had several I could share. I thought about my first year of teaching when I encountered apathy on the part of parents towards the school's music program. Prior to my arrival, the program had been taught by a teacher who believed in a traditional, formal program, a program which the students disliked intensely. I started my teaching assignment in the middle of the year and having had no formal training in teaching music, I encountered several behaviour challenges during my first few classes and, as a result, I chose to contact the parents of several students who were causing the greatest difficulty. To my surprise and dismay, I found the parents were as negative about the music program as their children were. I asked my principal for some advice on how to handle the situation and his response was to do whatever I needed to do as long as I did not create any waves. I felt isolated and on my own and I struggled to find a way to hook my students in. From this experience I learned that I was the key to making my classes successful. Remembering this became an integral part of my professional practice.

Laurie felt isolated and on her own when, as district professional development coordinator, she pursued the Alberta Teachers' Association's request to find out where the associations funds for professional development had gone. She believed her persistence and refusal to walk away from the situation created long-term ramifications,

such as being declared surplus from her treasured assignment, which required her to reshape her professional identity.

Like Laurie, Joanne also experienced a lack of respect and affirmation from her Australian principal. She shared she found it very difficult to establish a positive relationship with him as he was a person who really didn't stand behind his teachers. Joanne believed this principal's lack of support for his teachers had caused two teachers to seek jobs elsewhere.

Cherie spoke about how Keith affirmed for her how "not to treat people" and the lack of support staff members felt by the way he treated them. She found him to be intimidating and controlling. In her story of the inebriated kindergarten parent, Cherie talked about how Keith made a comment regarding her actions in that she needed to know the right thing to do the next time. His suggestion as to the "right thing to do" was exactly what Cherie had done. I believed his lack of understanding caused Cherie to feel a lack of support.

Lack of support within a school can create a dissonance just as harmony in music can clash and create discord, a feeling of unease. This clash of harmonies can be disruptive to a melody and by itself, dissonance does not make any sense. It must be part of the melody for the listener to sense the discord. The dissonance must also move towards some form of resolution if it is going to come together with the music and then slide into place. As with music, dissonance through lack of support on the professional landscape

of school can be very powerful, as in Laurie's situation, because it can cause a reevaluation and reshaping of professional practice.

It was important to note that dissonance through lack of support should not be confused with conflict. Dissonance is a greater struggle than conflict and creates a resolution that is often unsettling and/or disruptive. Glickman (1990) found conflict to be a normal part of group development. He further believed conflict was often a healthy aspect of problem solving. Principals in Glickman's study reported that productive forms of conflict such as disagreement and debate, conflicts without personal hostility, created an "openness and expressiveness" among staff. Rinehart, Short, and Johnson (1994) noted a positive relationship between staff empowerment and conflict as they found conflict was often the result of an open disclosure of staff values and beliefs.

Louis and Smith (cited in Seyfarth, 1996, p. 197) believed a lack of support was represented when a lack of respect was shown to teachers causing them to believe "that their work [was] unimportant and unappreciated." Seyfarth (1996) found this lack of respect and support for others was demonstrated in obvious and subtle ways. He said behavior that indirectly showed a lack of respect and support "erode[d] an individual's self-confidence and sense of efficacy," whereas obvious displays of behaviour lead to teachers "experiencing a threat to his or her psychological security" (p. 197).

Lambert et al. (1995) found "incidents that brought dissonance and fluctuations to the school played a critical role in the rhythm and movement of change" (p. 80) of schools.

They encouraged principals to respond to dissonance by using the following steps: "dissonance, processing and conversing, redefining, and moving on" (p. 80).

In the lack of support stories shared by Cherie, Laurie and Joanne, each of the three participants were able to turn their experience into a positive influence. Cherie shared how she learned how not to treat people and as a result was more aware of the affects her actions have on others. Laurie learned to reshape her professional and personal landscapes into one that encouraged a healthier lifestyle and Joanne learned to focus on what was most important for her, her students.

The melody of supportive principal-teacher relationships in the eight stories selected was identified as having the greatest influence on my participants' professional practice. This melody of supportive relationships was played using eight harmony patterns which added strength to the melody line. The next movement was the final overture of my symphony of stories.

The Final Overture

Although supportive leadership was only one of the many melody lines played on the principal's professional landscape, research by Blase and Blase (1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b); Blase and Kirby (2000); Seyfarth (1996, 1999); Lambert et al. (1995); Lambert (1998); Cole (1990); Sergiovanni (1995), et al. has shown us it was a critical one.

In their study of 92 schools, Asbill and Gonzalez (2000) discussed the importance of daily positive, supportive interactions between principals and teachers. They found principals who behaved in a supportive manner created positive relationships, increased teacher job satisfaction, enhanced school climate, and augmented school effectiveness, which resulted in a transformed school settings (p. 24). Seyfarth, (1999) believed these interactions occurred when

> principals motivate teachers by providing the support and resources they need to do their work. They (the principal) encourage innovative teaching, assist with specific problems of classroom management and instruction, facilitate communication among teachers. (p. 83)

Seyfarth (1996) found supportive leadership was also demonstrated when teachers had "opportunities to work collaboratively with others and receive respect from others," as well as "opportunities to use one's knowledge and skill and to receive feedback on one's performance" (p. 203).

Goldhammer, Becker, Withycombe, Doyel, Miller, Morgan, DeLoretto, and Aldridge (1971) believed supportive principals had

> an ability to work effectively with people and to secure their cooperation. They were proud of their teachers and accepted them as professionally dedicated and competent people. They inspired confidence and developed enthusiasm. The principals used group processes effectively; listened well to parents, teachers, and pupils; and appeared to have intuitive skill and empathy for their associates. (p. 3)

Cole (1990) found teachers believed it was critical for a principal to be a strong "people person." The emphasis principals placed on human relations had "a direct influence on

the motivation of teachers, the relationships which developed between staff and the principal and between staff members, and on the positiveness of the atmosphere prevailing in the school" (p. iv). The participants in my study supported Cole's findings. Joanne, Cherie and Laurie all spoke about the importance Penny placed on relationships and her skills as a people person. Penny confirmed their perceptions numerous times in our interviews when she emphasized the importance of relationships on her professional landscape. Joanne also spoke of how the relationship she had with her Moncton and Fort Simpson principals motivated her to succeed. Laurie spoke in-depth about her relationship with Boss both on and off her professional landscape and Penny spoke of how her first principal's involvement with his staff in and outside the school created a sense of family.

Lambert (1998) confirmed the importance of supportive relationships when building trusting environments. She said:

> We need to know each other as whole individuals: as colleagues, friends, parents, citizens. It is through these relationships that we can understand and respect each other's experiences, values, and aspirations. (p. 79)

In my research, the harmony patterns of confidence, affirmation, reflective practice, listening, a sense of humour, and reported lack of support were the most significant influences for my participants. I believe the stories shared demonstrated the need for principals to influence their teachers through supportive harmonic leadership patterns. I also believe it was this authentic support that enabled my participants to be successful on their professional landscape.

CHAPTER NINE – INFLUENCING MY PRACTICE, THE LESSONS I'VE LEARNED A REFLECTION

Dear Penny, Laurie, Cherie and Joanne,

We are fast approaching the end of June and a year has passed since the four of you first came into my life. My experiences over the last twelve months included many wonderings, discoveries, and new friendships. Over this time, you all played such an integral part in my story that I wanted to share my reflections with you in a public letter as I close this chapter in my professional journey.

I learned many things this past year. When I set out on this adventure at Meadowview School, I did so to find answers to some persistent questions I have had over the past fourteen years as a principal, "Do I make a difference in the lives of teachers? And if so, how?" Imagine my surprise when, over the course of my time with you, I met a former student I taught twenty-two years ago whose daughter is now in your school, a former parent who was doing some technical work for you whose children I worked with thirteen years ago and, at your Christmas Concert, a grandparent of former students from eight years ago! I so appreciated the conversations I had with these three people. The stories they shared of how I influenced them and their children/grandchildren helped me to personally validate my work with children. It was through the sharing of your stories and my own in this narrative inquiry that I was better able to understand the influences principals and teachers have on each other.

Looking for a Research Topic

When I started searching for a research topic three years ago, I knew I wanted to focus on the principalship as I believed being a principal enabled me to be part of "all that is good" about school. Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to work with many teachers who helped me to learn and grow. These teachers allowed me to watch them in action and to take away strategies and skills that influenced my practice in many ways. One of the most memorable examples of this occurred when the teachers in one of my schools presented at a district "Best Practices" conference about six years ago. Our school had been involved in a program called "Quantum Leap" where the school staff selected and focused on the strategy they believed would most improve student achievement. The strategy our school selected was reciprocal teaching. After working with this strategy for the better part of eight months, I asked the teachers if they would present their findings at the conference. Although they were hesitant to do so, they reluctantly agreed. Over the course of the next month, I watched in awe as they prepared for their presentation. On numerous occasions my office was commandeered as they gathered around my computer and shared and recorded their classroom practices. Even the quietest members on staff contributed to the presentation and I will never forget the influence their laughter and conversations had on me. I do not think I have ever been as proud as I was on that day when staff member after staff member stood up and shared their practices with their conference colleagues from around the district. Their presentation was profound and the handout materials provided other teachers with excellent information to use in their classrooms. This story, more than any other, showed me how I was able to influence teachers. This was an awakening or realization for me, as I had never seen such a clear

result of my guidance and encouragement before. My practice was also influenced by the work of the teachers who participated in this professional development activity as I chose to complete my master's project based on the Quantum Leap project. As a result of this awakening, I believed it was important to focus my research journey in an area where I would be able to continue to provide the ways and means to influence teachers' practice.

Focusing on my Research Topic

From the beginning of my research journey, I knew I would need to reexamine and possibly make changes in my professional practice. These changes, as Sergiovanni (1995) said needed to be "based on a deeper understanding of teachers and their needs and an ethic of caring that honours and respects this understanding" (p. 25). I believed I could best do this by working directly with teachers.

In July, 2000, I wrote a paper about my belief that I would be in the principalship for at least another ten years, a period of time that held endless opportunities for me to learn and to grow. I also wrote about the fear and absolute panic I felt when I realized my perception of the principals who had influenced my practice was shaped by my limited and often neutral experiences. I believed most of these principals hoped that, if left alone, I would recognize the errors of my ways and change my practice to a more common one. I wondered if my limited experience restricted my stories of principals who had positively influenced my practice as a teacher and if this limited experience had jaded my perception. With the changing role of the principal in recent years, I wondered what stories I would hear about how principals influenced the lives of teachers. I worried

that the influence teachers might speak of would be stories of "staying out of the way." I knew how disillusioned I would be if this was the case. However, I still wanted to pursue my wonder. I wondered how I would go about finding an answer to my question in a meaningful method.

Using Narrative Inquiry and Story

When I looked for a research method, I knew I wanted my research to be more than figures and numbers and decided I wanted to explore and push some personal boundaries. I wanted to understand what people meant when they talked about the influences principals and teachers had. I turned to narrative inquiry because it was, as Clandinin and Connelly said (2000), "a process of learning to think narratively, to attend to lives as lived narratively and to position inquiries within a metaphorical three-dimensional space" (p. 120). This metaphorical three-dimensional space was explained as a "telling stories of our past that frame our present standpoints, moving back and forth from the personal to the social, and situating it all in place" (p. 70).

I believed using a narrative inquiry method would be best suited to understanding the lives of principals and teachers as lived by exploring my stories and the stories of others. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) elaborated that the purpose of using my own stories in narrative inquiry was to share my experiences with you and others and also to promote further personal reflection to help make sense of my professional identity as I had lived it. Reflecting on my professional stories was not an easy task for me to do. At times, I found I reframed my stories based on my experiences since they had occurred. I had to

struggle to remember my sense of place at the time these stories occurred. As I looked at the stories I shared throughout my thesis, I found I started to examine them from a different lens or point of view. After twenty-four years in teaching, some of my beginning teaching stories took on a different perspective as I thought of them from the experienced teacher lens or the principal lens. I wondered how I would respond now if I was in a similar situation. Would some of my stories be lived differently? I think so.

Mattingly (1991) further elaborated on my wondering by saying the "process of sharing our stories encourages us to become more aware of ourselves, of who we are, of where we came from and of what we are going to do in the future" (p. 237). Once I decided on the method for my research, I needed to look for participants and for the narrative research process that would best help me answer my questions.

The Narrative Research Process

I know I was indeed fortunate to be able to take a paid sabbatical this year to focus solely on the research component of my doctoral work. This time allowed me to devote my energies to researching and reflecting. I found working in a school outside of my school district not only assisted me in meeting the ethical considerations for the university but it also allowed me to understand life in a school in a district other than my own. Doing my research at Meadowview helped me to learn new and perhaps better ways of dealing with my world of school. I know concepts as simple as having a recess five-minute warning bell will help me to reduce the number of students who straggle in long after the bell. Being placed on the professional landscape of a school in a rural community also helped

me to see and feel the strong sense of community within the school setting and reinforced for me the influence schools have on people. Your classroom and school celebrations, such as Hallowe'en, fire safety, and the Christmas Concert helped to affirm my impressions.

Working with you allowed me to better understand the happenings in the classroom in the year 2001. Each of you gave me strategies and skills to take back to my next assignment as principal. To have the time to reflect on my research as I traveled the forty-five minutes back and forth to school each day was a blessing for me. It allowed me to record my thoughts, impressions and wonderings while they were still fresh in my mind.

To have storied and reflected with four such incredible, open and trusting educators allowed me to grow in ways I could not have imagined a year ago. I remember my feelings of anxiety, my fear of intrusion into your space and yet I can say, never once did I feel like I was a burden to you, I had a sense of belonging. Thanks to your friendship, I became part of the staff with little need for transition and without any feeling of isolation. You enabled me to have an inside view of your professional and personal lives, lives that were diverse because of your various professional responsibilities and the experiences you brought to the classroom. You risked sharing with me and you willingly opened your school, your classrooms, and your hearts to me and for this, I thank you.

When you first started to share your stories with me, I began to realize the full impact of using narrative inquiry as a research method and how it shaped my research from the

very beginning. There were many times when I felt I was reliving your stories with you. Bateson (2000) wrote:

> when you let your lives touch and make the effort of asking questions and listening to the stories they tell, you discover the intricate patterns of their differences, and at the same time, the underlying themes that all members … have in common. (p. 5)

And we were able to find those underlying themes and make connections with each other. Penny, I will never forget laughing as you described what a brat you were in school. I, too, could have been described in that way. Laurie, you talked about how important a sense of humour was for you and I can not even count the number of times I used humour to relieve difficult situations. Cherie, you shared how you learned to trust your instincts, your gut feelings, a strategy that guided my practice for so many years. Joanne, your stories showed a personal resilience, a resilience I have found critical in my world of school.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) told us "storytelling is a relational act … [where] the storyteller learns through the act of storytelling" (p. 155). From listening to your stories, I learned that part of who I am as a teacher and principal is similar to who others are as well. Working alongside you on your complex professional knowledge landscape, I became aware that although we are different from each other because of our experiences, we share many beliefs and practices. Many of your stories resonated with me. You reaffirmed for me that humour has an important place on the school landscape. You helped me to realize those positive little notes I write to staff do make a difference. You taught me how your stories of negative influence could be turned into positive lessons to

learn from. You validated for me the importance of encouraging and facilitating professional growth.

You worked hard to make my experience successful. On a daily basis, you expressed your appreciation for me and my efforts in the classroom. You shared your passion for teaching with me in and out of the classroom, in our conversations and in our interviews. I was impressed that, while sharing your stories, you wanted to ensure you honoured those you worked with.

Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, and Kennard (1993) wrote:

> We learn to know our own stories better by hearing others' stories. As we listened to others' stories, we not only heard echoes of our own stories, but saw new shades of meaning in them. (p. 2)

I tried to keep an open mind to hear the new shades of meaning as I listened to your stories so I would be able to understand them. Each of you experienced many stories which I had not. Cherie, you talked about the various moves you made as a child, and although I never experienced that, I have had many students who have. Listening to your stories gave me an insight into how you handled those transitions. Joanne, you talked about teaching all over the world. I have only taught in one school district and have not experienced teaching in different districts with different visions, goals and philosophies. Listening to your stories helped me understand some of the differences you experienced. Laurie, you talked about teaching as a second career, after you had been a district home economist. My professional life has been focused solely on teaching. Listening to your stories helped me realize why some people make career changes. Penny, you talked

about working and living in a small community up north. I have only taught in a large urban centre and listening to your stories helped me understand a different meaning of school community and collegial relationships within a small rural setting. The faith the four of you had in me, to share your stories, humbled me. Clandinin et al. (1993) told us:

> As we read the work of researchers and practitioners and talked about their ideas and how they helped us make sense of our lives, we also saw … [the] world through a different lens." (p.2)

I found many of your stories were very powerful and they brought back many memories. I worked hard to honour your stories and care for them as they connected with me. Your stories helped me to better understand how my work as a principal influenced those around me and how others influenced me. While listening, transcribing and analyzing your stories, I recalled many memories that shaped my professional identity. I thought about watching teachers handle behaviour management strategies in class and how, over the years, I learned new ways to work with children. I remembered some of my formal observations in classrooms over the past fourteen years and how one teacher was able to teach a math concept in one short thirty-minute lesson when I struggled and struggled for days to teach the same concept to a class, and there are so many others I could share. I also recalled stories of influencing others. I thought about the university classes I have lectured in and the feedback sheets I received from students, talking about how my advice on classroom management made so much sense and how they would use my handout as a resource guide. I remembered how I stood up to three powerful teachers in my school when they publicly criticized a first year teacher for using tables and chairs and centres instead of teaching in a more common way. Your stories informed my

practice and I know they will influence how I work with others in the future. Mattingly (1991) said:

> Stories not only give meaning to experiences we have already lived through. They also provide us a forward glance, helping us anticipate meaningful shapes for situations even before we enter them allowing us to envision endings from the very beginning. (p. 237)

I appreciated having the opportunity to hold our interviews in a variety of places. From Penny's office and other offices in the school, to the classroom and to your home, Joanne, you always gave me the impression you were comfortable to share your stories with me wherever we talked. Our times together often allowed me to make many unique and wonderful discoveries about you. Although we had some tentatively scripted interview questions, you never hesitated to answer the questions that popped into my head as I learned more about who you were.

I found relistening to the tapes to transcribe them and, on occasion to recheck my transcriptions, provided me with a deeper understanding of your stories. I know it was difficult for you to read the transcripts. I think, as teachers, we strive to have everything grammatically correct and flow coherently but as I told you, my fear was that the readers would not be able to get a sense of who you are in your practice if I edited your words extensively. I did, however, have to eliminate a lot of "laughing" notes as I realized half of my thesis would denote our laughter and I believed the reader would have lost the thread of your stories if I had left them in.

You were so patient with me over these past six months as I worked to reflect and understand the melodies and harmony patterns shared with me. Even though, I read numerous pieces of professional literature on the use of story, I do not believe I fully understood the importance our life history plays until I reached the writing component of my research. However, you did not forget me and I so appreciated your telephone calls and invitations to participate with you and the rest of the staff in various social activities.

Our time together, in and out of the classroom, documented through field notes, journal entries, and transcribed interviews provided me with what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described as "possibilities for reliving, for new directions and new ways of doing things" (p. 189).

Being the Researcher

I hoped the experience of observing and working in your classrooms and school would lead me to discover a new way of looking at the professional knowledge landscape and of talking about what I saw. In the beginning, I struggled to understand my role as researcher, and not teacher and principal. However, I was amazed how quickly I became a participant researcher in your classrooms. I found myself caught up in the action and shadings of each activity. For the first time in my career, I was able to ask teachers the question of "Why?" Why did you do a certain thing? Why was it important? Why would it make a difference? The time you took to talk with me during recess and before and after school did not always add to my understanding of my research question but it

certainly added to my learnings as a teacher and a principal. Your explanations allowed me to not only observe but helped to move me inside the events I was trying to describe.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) discussed "how teachers' personal practical knowledge interacts with the professional knowledge landscape" (p. 103) and through our discussions I had a better understanding of why you did things a certain way. They (1999) wrote "landscape has a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions" (p. 2). By participating in your day-to-day world of school, I believed I was able to better understand your place on your professional landscape within these dimensions. The opportunity to play for the choir and at your Christmas concert provided me with additional lens that allowed me to be part of your professional knowledge landscape with staff and students on yet another level. I found I did not want my time at Meadowview to end. The joy and laughter you shared with me will not be forgotten.

When I began my research journey twelve months ago, I looked at how principals influence teachers' practices and how their practices were influenced by teachers. The three lenses I used were principals as learners, principals as teachers and principals as mentors. I would like to share with you some of my learnings in each of these areas.

Principals as Learners

In the area of principal as learner, what surprised me the most was how much I still needed to learn about the influence of principals and teachers on each other. I also realized, as Blase and Blase (1998) found, how critical it was for me to continue to learn

on an on-going basis. Crow, Matthew, and McCleary (1996) wrote principals can learn through "respecting and encouraging [teachers'] visions and modeling behaviour that facilitates the accomplishment" of them. They found this respect and encouragement influenced teachers to "risk constructing and communicating a vision with their colleagues" (p. 34).

Penny, you shared with me how you have learned to look for that second perspective, that "grain of truth" from those you worked with and how this has influenced your practice. Although I know people may interpret "grain of truth" to imply there is a degree of untruth or lying, I believe what you meant was recognizing you may not have all the information that would help you make an informed decision. What struck me when I listened to your stories, was how this influence not only occurred during major incidents but also when you were asked to reflect on different aspects of your practice. Similar to work done by Schön (1983), Lambert et al. (1995), Blase and Blase (1997, 1998a, 1998b 1999b), Clandinin and Connelly (1995, 1999, 2000), Daloz (1999) and Malderez and Bodóczky (1999), you talked about using reflective practice in the mentorship program with Cherie and John, and how this one-on-one relationship encouraged you to reassess and discuss decisions you made. You also talked about Vicki and her way of looking at alternative strategies which assisted you in being more effective.

Crow, et al. (1996) wrote:

> Before principals can influence students, teachers, parents, other administrators, and community members to develop learning skills for school improvement, they must reflect on their own practice.....Often principals need to initiate reflection with others. Dialogue is a form of reflection. (p. 117)

I also learned from you, Penny, the importance of including dialogue in my reflections. I believed reflection was most importantly done through self-reflection, but you have highlighted for me the need to share with others as Lieberman (1995) and Harstock (1983) found in their work. I found this was particularly true when I reflected on my research notes for this thesis. At times, I felt like my mind was like a bouncing atom, ricocheting off the walls of my brain and I was bursting to share with others. Thank goodness for my supervisory committee.

Each of you showed me your passion for teaching and for children. Ramsey (1999) wrote "the biggest distinction between effective leaders and also-rans, wannabes, or run-of-the-mill [principals] is passion" (p. 9). Through our time together, I believed you helped me rediscover a part of my passion for teaching that had become lost over my last year as a school principal and I know I will be a better principal because of this renewal. All of you shared the importance of listening. Laurie, you talked of Boss; Penny, you talked of Elaine; Joanne, you talked of Penny; and Cherie, you talked about the administrators from the Educational Leadership Academy. Your stories added to the research I read by Lambert (1998), Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998), Blase and Blase (1997) and Daresh (2001). As well, from listening to me, Cherie, you also knew my fears regarding my candidacy exam. Your homemade survival kit helped me get through it and I am hoping it will continue to remind me of your support and give me courage as I enter my new school in the fall.

Blase and Blase (1997), Covey (1998), Foster (1998) and Cole (1990) wrote of the importance of a sense of humour in relationships. All four of you affirmed their work and shared how relationships and a sense of humour were critical for principals. Lambert et al. (1995) wrote "when we laugh together, we often challenge, then reframe old perspectives" (p. 62). As I sit here writing today, I can still hear the echoes of your laughter throughout the school.

You taught me how visibility and active involvement by your principals helped shape who you are today. Your stories were supported through the work of Harstock (1983), Lieberman (1995), DuFour and Eaker (1998) and Zepeda (1996). Joanne, you talked of how your principal in Fort Simpson helped you with the behaviourally challenged class and advocated for you to take Jason home to New Brunswick for part of the summer.

Harstock (1983) and Lieberman found principals needed to act as partners in collaborative efforts with teachers. Cherie, you talked of how all your principals believed in and encouraged professional development. This belief confirmed the work of Zepeda (1999) and DuFour and Eaker (1998). DuFour and Eaker (1998) wrote that schools need to create professional learning communities and do so through professional development. I was so glad your stories were not ones that spoke of total isolation. And although you, Joanne and Cherie, spoke of being on your own, I perceived your stories as ones where the principal demonstrated a confidence in what you were doing and gave you the freedom to travel on your own path.

I also learned, as Capasso and Daresh (2001) found, how your first teaching assignment helped to shape your practice. When I reflect on my first assignment, I think of how Grace shaped and continues to shape my personal life and my professional practice. I also think of the many other friendships that developed in my first school. Many of those teachers are close and dear friends who I can call on for advice and support today just as I did twenty-fours years ago.

You taught me how important it was to be willing to take on new challenges using your past experiences to guide and shape you, including those from your childhood. In their research, Ackerman et al. (1996), DuFour and Eaker (1998), and Jentz and Wolford (1979) also discussed the importance of risktaking. From you, I learned about the challenge of multi-level groupings in your classrooms and, although we talk about such groupings in our district, you are truly masters in the practice of it.

One of the most important learnings for me was how critical affirmation of practice was for each of you. Blase and Blase (1999b), Cole (1990), Neis (1994), Blase and Kirby (2000) and Ubben, Hughes and Norris (2001) discussed affirmation in great length in their research and, although I knew affirmation was important, I guess I forgot how important it was. The impact of your notes to me, words of appreciation, and public recognition were like the crash of huge cymbals. I knew recognition and affirmation were a part of my practice and a part I did well, but I had no idea the influence on those who received it. And you are right, Penny, when you use an analogy of teachers as your class, your students. Just as I would pass on words of support and encouragement to my

students on a frequent basis, so too, must I continue to use this strategy regularly with staff.

Finally, I learned how, although you are similar in many ways, as King and Kercher (1991) and Blase and Kirby (2000) found, it is your uniqueness that added to my research. For example, Joanne, I believe you valued the different teaching experiences you had in different parts of the world. Cherie, I think you valued the resiliency you developed through the various moves you made as a child. Laurie, I feel you valued the opportunity to redefine your teaching philosophies and beliefs. Penny, I believe you valued developing the strengths of others on your school landscape.

The four of you further confirmed the findings of Cole (1990), Reitzug (1997), and Short and Greer (1997) when you emphasized the importance of working together, supporting each other through your professional journey. I believed on-going learning was important to the principal as learner to influence teachers' practices. This included the use of reflective practice using self-reflection and dialogue, active involvement, and a willingness to take on new challenges. Principals as learners developed strong relationships with their staff through listening, using a sense of humour, affirming practice, and recognizing and utilizing the individual strengths of teachers when working together. I believed it is through working together we could teach each other to become better educators.

Principals as Teachers

Crow et al. (1996) wrote:

> Principals as leaders of leaders serve in a teaching role to influence teachers, students, parents, and the community to reflect on their ways of understanding the purpose of schools and the nature of teaching and learning that opens them to new considerations of what schools can do. (p. 106)

Just as I learned principals must continue to acquire new knowledge, so, too, has my research shown me there are many skills a principal can teach their staff. Penny, as Capasso and Daresh (2001) and Brookover (1982) found, you taught me how to teach staff members to reexamine school practices, specifically to rethink the purpose of staff recognition awards. You turned the concept of individual teachers winning awards around and tried to teach your staff to look at these as celebrations for the whole school. However, recognizing the importance for you of collegial relationships, and as a result of our further discussions, I believe you would have accepted their decision had they still been opposed but were pleased they were open to rethinking the idea of staff recognition awards.

You modeled an openness and willingness, similar to that described by Blase and Blase (1997) which encouraged your staff to be open to new ideas as well. I am not sure my research experience would have been as successful in a school where a principal was only 'doing a favour' for a friend by allowing me to enter onto their professional landscape. I saw how your willingness, Penny, to share both your professional and personal life encouraged other staff members to share theirs. From your speech regarding respect for

all parents, I also heard from other teachers how important it was that you included yourself as part of the problem and solution.

Joanne, you taught me that, as a principal, having confidence in my staff members and letting them know I'm there to support them any way I can, will enable them to develop confidence within themselves. Bova and Phillips (1984), Short and Greer (1997), Cole (1990), and Blase and Kirby (2000) confirmed your belief that the demonstration of this confidence allowed teachers to take risks in their practice. Laurie, you taught me how a demonstration of support or lack there of, can shape a teacher's practice for a long time. Seyfarth (1996), Louis and Smith (cited in Seyfarth, 1996), and Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (1995) also supported your belief. You also shared, as did the research by Blase and Blase (1997), Covey (1998), Foster (1998), and Cole (1990), how a sense of humour brings a human side to principals and teaches teachers humour has a place in school. Cherie, you taught me how I must teach my staff to have the courage to seek out new learning opportunities for professional growth and to recognize their personal strengths. Your belief was supported by the research done by Whitebook and Bellm (1996). You also reminded me to encourage teachers to celebrate the little things as well as the big accomplishments.

You all stressed that by giving of myself, I would be able to teach others to give of themselves. Sergiovanni (1995) and Boyd (1996) agreed with you but perhaps Ramsey (1999) said it best when he wrote:

> Your success as a leader who gets the most from people won't depend on your title, your degrees, or your previous experiences. It won't be the

> result of how much you know, how hard you work, what long hours you keep, or anything you say. It will rest almost totally on the way you treat people....The secret is to give what you like to get. (p. 50)

Your stories helped me to better understand the influence a principal has as a teacher of teachers. Teaching teachers to rethink their practices, displaying confidence in their efforts, encouraging risk taking for professional growth, using a sense of humour and giving of yourself to teach others to give are influences I believed principals have on teachers' practices. As well, a lack of support influenced teachers' practices in and out of the classroom in both negative and positive ways.

Although we can teach teachers many skills, I believe giving what you would like to get is best done through the mentoring process. Ramsey confirmed my belief when he said:

> What works best for school leaders today is a "coaching" style that helps people develop their own solutions, rather than handing out expert advice. This kind of leadership is based on demonstrated human values, such as truth, trust, mentoring, openness, risk taking, giving credit, sharing blame, honesty and caring. (p. 40)

Principals as Mentors

As I listened to your stories, I realized all of you had principals whom you considered to be your friend and mentor as well as your educational leader. Research by Healy and Welchert (1990), Daresh (2001), and Daloz (1999) supported the importance of the relationships you described. Joanne, you talked of Penny and how you turned to her during a difficult time in your personal life. Laurie, you talked of Boss and how he was someone you turned to during your struggles with the central office administration. Cherie, you also talked of how Penny mentored you through your district's leadership

program. She also shared how she valued the mentorship relationship the two of you had as it enabled her to reflect on her practices as well. Penny, you spoke of how your first principal was an integral part of your school family up north. From your stories, I believed, principals could be mentors in personal situations as well as professional ones.

Palmer (1998) said:

> The power of our mentors is not necessarily in the models of good teaching they gave us, models that may turn out to have little to do with who we are as teachers. Their power is in their capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives. (p. 21)

During my time at Meadowview, you shared how you valued each other and provided mentorship. Using methods similar to those discussed by Dewey (1938), Daresh (2001), Whitebook and Bellm (1996), I saw mentoring in the way you helped your colleagues with resources and support. I heard it when you shared ideas and suggestions. I felt it when your smile accompanied your words of appreciation for each other. You were part of a team, a family.

I believed the act of mentoring colleagues to influence practice was done in many ways in your stories. You worked alongside each other and pulled together in times of need, offering support through listening, advice giving, and reflection on practice.

<u>The Theme of Support</u>

I was surprised support was the main melody that played through your stories of influence. And yet, when I reflected on my stories of influence practices I realized

support was critical for me throughout my lifetime, in both my professional and personal life, particularly when my two younger brothers died. More people than I could ever have believed offered to do things to make my burden a little less. Again this year, with my personal family turmoil and my many flying trips to Calgary, never once did I feel anything but support from you the participants and from my supervisory committee. No one said, "Aren't you done, yet?" or "You really need to buckle down" or "Gail, you have your priorities wrong." All of you encouraged me to do what I could and accepted the fact I needed to be in Calgary with my family.

The influence of support on principals' and teachers' practices found in your stories validated the findings of Lambert (1998), Leithwood et al. (1999), Seyfarth (1996), Blase and Kirby (2000) and others. Laurie, Cherie and Joanne, you talked of how your practices were influenced when you believed your principals respected you and were concerned about you, both professionally and personally, while encouraging you to continue lifelong learning. I believe the same is true for you Penny, in that your stories tell of how your practice has been influenced when you believed your teachers respected you and were concerned about you, both professionally and personally, while encouraging you to continue lifelong learning. I believe the influence of support on the professional landscape of school warrants further examination.

My belief was further supported by Ramsey (1999), who shared how the Minneapolis-based Search Institute identified 40 crucial developmental assets all students needed as essential building blocks in order to achieve their full potential. These assets fell into

eight broad experiential categories, the first of which is support (p. 40). If this was true for students and we, too, are learners, as well as teachers and mentors, then I believed, support would be an essential building block for us, as well.

The melody of support has been played in many different harmony patterns throughout my research with you, confirming the need for it on the professional landscape of school. Many of your harmony patterns overlapped. However, each of you defined support in a slightly different way. Joanne, your stories illustrated how confidence and affirmation of practice were the two strongest harmony patterns. Penny, you talked of how listening and reflective practice were your harmony patterns of support. Laurie, you spoke of the importance of humour on your professional landscape and how lack of support helped to influence and reshape your professional identity. Cherie, you shared how active involvement and professional growth opportunities had, I believed, the most significant influence on your practice. Just as the harmony patterns in music vary, so to do your major harmony patterns of support.

The Influence of Gender on My Research

I realized my research was limited in focus by using only four women educator-participants to share their stories of how principals and teachers influenced their practices. I did not assume my dissertation was a generalizable one, one that discovered all the stories of influence on the professional landscape but rather one that told of what shaped your professional identities. I know there were many other stories of influence other teachers and principals could have shared in a similar study. However, I believe,

similar to findings by Witherell and Noddings (1991) your stories joined "the worlds of thought and feeling, and [gave a] special voice to the feminine side of human experience- the power emotion, intuition, and relationships have in human lives" (p. 4). Your stories helped demonstrate the complexities of human caring and conflict you experienced on your professional landscapes.

Curry (2000) found the stories of women's professional lives became interwoven with the stories of their personal lives, in a similar way to your stories. In the unpacking process, her participants recognized their approaches to their jobs could not be separated from the core values and beliefs around which they lived their personal lives. Her participants believed that although there were not quantitative differences in how they and men carried out their job, they realized women interpreted the world through quite different lenses than men (p. 70).

In an earlier study, Statham, Miller and Mauksch (1988) looked at women in a range of occupations and found that maintaining relationships was a key concern throughout (p. 26). Similar to your belief on the importance of relationships, Penny, the findings by Statham et al. and Curry (2000), supported research by Restine (1993) who found:

> relationships are a fundamental aspect of the female culture. The quality of interactions depends largely on the degree of trust that exists, the degree that creativity and risk taking are encouraged and the focus of commitment. Even though we may realize that disagreement and conflict are inevitable, our leadership behaviour needs to be based on creating supportive relationships and human connections. Whatever organizational and individual achievements and successes occur do so because of relationships between people. (pp. 31-32)

From her research, Hurty (1991) concluded women principals use and talk about their experiences as school leaders as ones of connectedness, shared leadership, and of empowerment. She believed connectedness referred to the importance of relationships and caring actions. Gilligan (1982) discussed women's concerns about relationships as an ethic of care while involved in decision-making. She suggested there was a thematic distinction between the way men and women approach ethical decision-making. In her research, she found two themes: an ethic of justice and an ethic of caring. These themes represented different modes of thinking about relationships, and while not entirely gender specific, the ethic of caring was apparent through observation of women, and through listening to their stories. In Gilligan's view, this does not rule the ethic of justice out of women's experience, nor does it limit caring to women, rather, effective school leaders integrate these themes in their decision-making. Regan and Brooks (1995) call this integration "relational knowing" (p. 63). Witherell and Noddings (1991) also discuss relational knowing as "a relational notion of self, formed and given meaning in the context of relations with others" (p. 5).

Restine (1993) believed women are a significant resource for learning how to lead schools. Women have influenced and made notable contributions throughout the history of education and their influence has profound implications for leading and changing schools (p. 15).

What implications does my research have for future organizations? As Valentine (1991), Lambert (1998), Statham et al. (1988), and others have found, I believe recognizing that

supportive relationships are important to women on their professional landscapes suggests school districts need to build this kind of structure into their school mandates.

Possibilities for Research – Principals and Teachers

As I near the end of my journey, I wondered if other researchers would hear stories to support my findings. How would the stories shared by other teachers and principals harmonize with the stories shared by my participants? Would they share the same melody line or one similar? I wondered if my findings would have been similar if I was in a teaching position rather than the principalship. I wondered if my learnings would have been as profound if I had taken a sabbatical earlier in my career. Would I have learned as much? If I had not had this time to focus and reflect on my research, would my stories be the same? Would yours? Would it matter if the research was done in an urban or rural community? Most importantly, I wondered if my findings would not only influence the next chapter of my journey bût continue to shape my life both inside and outside of my professional landscape.

Barone (2000) said stories must demonstrate accessibility to the reader, compellingness and moral persuasiveness, stories must have "the capacity to promote a kind of critical reflection that results in the reconstruction of a portion of the reader's value system" (p. 214). The stories you shared with me caused me to reflect on my practices as a principal. I hope they will also cause others to reflect on their practices.

Moving on to Tomorrow

Ramsey (1999) wrote:

> Tomorrow is something that can be shaped and influenced today. Whatever happens to your organization in the years ahead will have been created, prompted, or allowed by what you and your staff do or don't do today. (p. 32)

In our time together, you showed me that I, as the principal, am not the only individual who leads and influences people on the school landscape. At times, I followed the lead of others, and on other occasions, we led together. I am sure Bateson (2000) was thinking of someone like me when she wrote "I am not what I know but what I am willing to learn" (p. 18).

And now my friends, I close this letter to you so that I may go on learning in the next chapter of my life, the next movement in my symphony, a movement that will include support as one of the key melody lines both on and off my professional landscape. The overwhelming gifts of sharing and friendship you have given me over this past year will last for a lifetime. My memories of my time with you have greatly shaped who I am today and I know will shape my tomorrows. I have many more lessons to learn.

With the greatest respect,

Gail

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APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Tell me about yourself by sharing your personal history.
2. Tell me about how you came to be an elementary school teacher.
3. Tell me about your teaching philosophy and teaching beliefs.
4. Tell me about your past teaching experiences – the number of years you've taught and the types of teaching assignments you've had.
5. Tell me about the type of school environment you like to work in.
6. Tell me about the type of classroom environment you like to work in.
7. Tell me a story about a principal who has influenced your practice and how you believe they did so.

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview Questions for the Principal

1. Tell me about yourself by sharing your personal history.
2. Tell me about how you came to be an elementary school teacher.
3. Tell me about your teaching philosophy and teaching beliefs.
4. Tell me about your past teaching experiences – the number of years you've taught and the types of teaching assignments you've had.
5. Tell me about how you came to be an elementary school principal.
6. Tell me about your philosophy and beliefs about principals.
7. Tell me about your past principal experiences – the number of years you've been a principal and the types of assignments you've had.
8. Tell me about the type of school environment you like to work in.
9. Tell me about the type of classroom environment you like your teachers to have.
10. Tell me a story about a teacher who has influenced your practice and how you believe they did so.

APPENDIX C

Letter to Participants

University of Alberta

Dear _____,
(Name of Participant)

I am a teacher and a principal currently on sabbatical as a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. I am conducting a research study with a purpose to understand how principals influence teachers' practices and how teachers influence principals' practices and I would value your participation in my study.

The study will be conducted as a narrative inquiry, focusing on sharing stories of influence. Your involvement in the study would include an initial, taped interview to be arranged at your convenience when we would talk about your professional and personal history. As well, I will be in the school on a frequent basis over a three-month period and would like to work with you both in and out of your classroom and as such we would need to arrange times for regular classroom visits. The amount of time I spend with you is flexible and negotiable, depending on your needs, obligations, etc. I would anticipate that we would also be involved in informal conversations during the course of the research period. During my research, I would anticipate an additional two taped interview sessions to hear your stories of influence. Transcriptions of our interviews will be made available to you and you will have the right to request removal of any parts of your stories that you feel uncomfortable in sharing publicly. To complete my data, I would also like to look at any artifacts (newsletters, notes, plans, agendas, etc.) that you believe would assist me in this research. The final research text will be shared with you prior to the research document being shared with the public.

Participation in the study is free and voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. All data collected during the study will be secured and confidential, then destroyed upon completion of the study. Your anonymity is assured, pseudonyms will be used, timeframes will be blurred and you will not be identifiable in any document resulting from the research. The research will be conducted as approved by the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board, and in a manner that is respectful of your teaching practices and needs.

I hope that you will participate in this study. There are no known risks associated with participation, and while research benefits cannot be guaranteed, I expect that you will find the experience to be affirming of your professional practice, and that the research findings will increase educational stakeholders understandings in regards to influencing practice.

Should you have any questions, or desire further information, please contact me (439-7125 or email gbrierle@epsb.net) or my supervisor, Dr. Jean Clandinin (492-7770, ext. 247, or email jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca). Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Gail Brierley